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A Girl Graduate

BY

CELIA PARKER WOOLLEY

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A GIRL GRADUATE

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BY

CELIA PARKER WOOLLEY

AUTHOR OF "RACHEL ARMSTRONG; OR, LOVE AND THEOLOGY," ETC.

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
The Riverside Press, Cambridge

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TO

My Father and Mother,

WHOSE LIVES OF FAITHFUL DEVOTION TO THE GOOD
ARE A CONSTANT PRIZED EXAMPLE TO
THEIR LOVING DAUGHTER.

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A GIRL GRADUATE.

CHAPTER I.

SCHOOLGIRL TALK AND MANNERS.

THE afternoon session of the Litchfield High School closed at two o'clock, but the members of the graduating class had been detained for a final rehearsal of the next day's closing exercises, and it was after four when seven or eight young women came trooping down the front steps, talking and laughing. They walked a short distance together, in groups of twos and threes, until they reached a corner where their paths diverged and where they stopped for a few parting words.

"Maggie will have the best essay, of course," said Fanny Brown, with gay unconcern, "but I don't care; I know three people who are going to bring bouquets for me."

"Oh, dear," exclaimed Maggie, in mock distress, "and I haven't ordered one. I wonder if it's too late to go round to the conservatory now," glancing up at the town clock on the schoolhouse tower.

"Never mind, Maggie," said another, in a soothing tone, "Sidney Gale will attend to that."

Maggie flushed, and tossed her head, casting a quick, covert look in the direction of another girl who had not spoken; a dark-eyed young woman who seemed to hold herself a little aloof from her companions, standing on the edge of the group with a hesitating air, as if equally unwilling to go or to remain. She made a sudden movement as if to separate from the others, then, as if remembering herself, turned back and remained where she was. There was a short, embarrassed pause, to cover which two or three of the girls began an eager discussion of their plans for the following day, their new dresses, the prospect of fair weather, etc.

"We haven't decided whether we shall wear white slippers," said one.

"Why, yes, we have," another replied, with a positive air. "Of course, we shall wear them; I bought mine yesterday."

This was Dora Briggs, daughter of a wealthy dealer in eggs and poultry. She had a large, overgrown look, with bold black eyes, and was showily dressed.

"What do you think, Maggie?" the first asked. Maggie hesitated and seemed a little embarrassed, though she tried to look indifferent as she answered that she should not wear white slippers.

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Miss Briggs, "that just spoils everything. We ought to dress alike. Don't you think so, Laura?" addressing the dark-eyed girl.

"That is what Miss Bancroft wishes," the latter replied, rather stiffly. "She said we were to make

no invidious distinctions; but if there is any one who cannot afford white slippers — "

"Miss Danvers will agree to supply them," Maggie broke in, with an excited laugh. "What a pity we are not all in the wholesale leather trade."

An angry color surged over Laura Danvers' face, and she bent a displeased look on Maggie, whose blue eyes sparkled with a dangerous light as she stood there flushed and trembling. Glances of mingled amusement and dismay were exchanged between the other members of the group, which broke up now, Laura Danvers going alone down Lombard Street, the fashionable thoroughfare of the town, the others taking an opposite direction, all but Maggie and her friend Bertha Fay, who went directly ahead.

Laura Danvers had not meant to be rude, but she had a fatal directness of speech, born partly of honesty, but springing more from an inward restraint that knew not how to employ tactful expression for itself. It was no unusual thing for her to be by herself. Her cold, rather distrustful disposition kept her from entering readily into those intimate relations which girls of her age cultivate. There was a large fund of self-reliance in the girl's nature, which prevented her from feeling too deeply the loss thus incurred, at the same time that it caused her to hold herself aloof from those whose companionship she would have prized, but knew not how to win. She was not so sufficient to herself, however, as not to long at times for a near friend, one she could call her very own, who should stand to her in the same relation of

close admiring affection that Bertha Fay did towards Maggie Dean, an affection won, not through accidental circumstance, but solely for her own worth and merit. It was a sore trial to her, at times, to witness her classmate's popularity, not so much because she was jealous as because it made her own loneliness the more apparent.

Wherever she went, Maggie seemed to make a new centre for herself. Her schoolmates clustered about her desk at recess, made her chief guide and spokesman in all their plans, looked up to watch and smile at her if she crossed the room, quoted her sayings, and copied her way of doing her hair. Laura Danvers received many attentions also, but she instinctively felt they were offered in a different spirit. She was studious, and held a commanding social position among her acquaintances, which secured her general esteem; but all this was nothing compared to the spontaneous love and admiration Maggie Dean had power to win. What was the secret of her influence? Laura Danvers often asked herself. Was it to be found in her mental qualities? But Laura was a better scholar than Maggie, since the latter had the habit of studying only when she felt like it. Her quick eye would dart down the page and seize its meaning at a glance, though she often forgot it as easily, while her companion, who worked harder for what she got, retained it longer. Yet Maggie could remember things, too, when she liked and it seemed worth while, and had a reputation for intellectual brilliancy that took the place of more solid attainments. Maggie's popularity

did not lie in a mere quality of the head, nor was it because she was, in the pietistic sense of the word, "good." On the contrary, she had many faults which her best friends were obliged to admit, and which Maggie also seemed to recognize without taking pains to cure. Was it because of her apparent unconsciousness, that seeming absence of all intention or desire to outshine any one else? Certainly if it is an art to be a favorite, and yet never betray by the faintest flicker of an eyelid gratified consciousness of the same, Maggie had attained that art. She never took advantage of her position. Nobody called her vain or self-seeking, nor would Laura Danvers permit herself to do so. Until lately, her feeling about Maggie had lain half dormant, being but part of a growing perplexity and discontent with herself. It was not until the association of Maggie's name with that of her cousin, Sidney Gale, that this feeling had taken more tangible shape, and become one of personal dread and distrust.

"That was very rude in you, Maggie," said Bertha, after they had gone on a few steps, "to refer to her father's business in that way." Bertha Fay was a kindly and sensible-faced girl, and the valedictorian of the class.

"Not half as rude as she was to me," the other quickly rejoined. "'Invidious distinctions' indeed!"

"Perhaps not," was the quiet reply, "but such things do no good, and are undignified besides. I have heard my mother say that a sharp tongue is like a two-edged sword. It cuts both ways."

"Oh, it's perfectly true," groaned Maggie. "I think sometimes I should like to tear mine out. But what would you have me do?" turning impetuously to her companion, "keep still and let Laura Danvers say all manner of insulting things to me?"

"If you had not answered her, she would have been ashamed of herself. As it is, you have made her dislike you more than ever."

"Why should she dislike me?" Maggie cried. "I am as good as she, and have as good manners, though mercy knows that is saying little for either one of us. It is because my father is poor, and — and a working-man."

"No, Maggie, that is not all," Bertha replied. "My father is poor too."

"Oh, but he is the minister."

"There's another reason," Bertha went on; "she is jealous."

Maggie lifted her eyebrows, and tried to look as if she did not understand; but her eyes fell before the clear, direct gaze of her companion.

"Why do you let Sidney Gale walk home with you every night from school?" Bertha continued, reprovingly.

"Every night!" Maggie repeated, in pretended astonishment. Then, in a lighter tone, "I didn't know that Sidney Gale was Laura Danvers' property."

"They are engaged to be married."

"I'm not so sure of that," Maggie replied. She spoke with the air of one who could impart weighty secrets on some subjects if she chose.

"It amounts to the same thing. Their fathers were partners; Mr. Danvers has helped his nephew a great deal. Mrs. Danvers talks as if it were all settled; he visits her regularly, and" —

"Who visits whom regularly?" Maggie interposed, mischievously. "Mind your pronouns, my dear."

"You know what I mean," Bertha replied, smiling a little, but refusing to leave her ground. "Besides, — now, you'll not be angry with me, Maggie, if I speak plainly," dropping her voice to a more serious tone, and taking her friend's arm.

"I couldn't be angry with you if I tried," the other answered, affectionately. Nevertheless, her manner betrayed a little nervous apprehension.

"It is only this, Maggie. If — if Mr. Gale wants to walk home with you, why doesn't he come to the schoolhouse, as he does to meet his cousin sometimes, and not wait to join you on some back street?"

"Bertha Fay, I'll never speak to you again as long as I live," Maggie exclaimed, withdrawing herself from her friend, her face ablaze with indignation and wounded pride.

"I was afraid you would be angry," Bertha said, but not seeming in the least alarmed by the threat she had heard.

"Just because a young man happens to overtake a girl once or twice," Maggie began again, in a voice that threatened to give way at every word, "when he has — has business that way, people must talk like that. And to think that you too, Bertha" — here her breath came faster and her features began to work

convulsively. "I never would have believed it, never!" and she broke down in a fit of hysterical crying.

"Hush, Maggie, I didn't mean that. I only wanted to warn you. Do hush, Maggie; some one will see us."

This last appeal had its effect, and Maggie, her breast still heaving, began slowly drying her eyes, sobbing out, in a grieved, helpless tone, that she had never heard of anything so unjust and untrue in her life, and that she hadn't a friend in the world.

"Now, Maggie, you know that isn't true," Bertha answered, in her straightforward fashion. "Everybody likes and admires you, and you know there isn't a girl in town I love so well."

"But you don't re — respect me," Maggie replied, in a childish tone, that made the other smile.

"I do respect you, and that is why I want you to appear always at your best and stop flirting with an engaged man."

"You don't know that he is engaged," Maggie said, with a return of her old manner.

"Everybody says so."

"That's nothing. Everybody says some other people are engaged too."

"You mean yourself and Henry Parsons?" Bertha asked, quickly. "Is it true, Maggie?" bending round to catch her friend's eye, which was obstinately fixed on the distant horizon. "I am so glad if it is. Papa and mamma like him so much. He is a model young man, I should think."

A pleased light shone in Maggie's eyes, but she still held them apart from her companion's.

"Model young men are apt to be tiresome," she said, lightly.

"Oh, for shame, Maggie; when he has always worked so hard and done everything for himself, with no bad habits either. Such a young man is worth a dozen Sidney Gales."

Maggie was just sensible enough of the justice of this rebuke to feel irritated by it.

"If you think so highly of him, why don't you set your cap for him yourself?" Bertha looked displeased.

"There, now," exclaimed the other, in quick remorse. "What makes me say coarse, silly things like that, I wonder? I believe there are two people inside me. One is a hateful little imp, always making me do something wrong or foolish. That's my true self, I'm afraid," with a rueful smile. "The other's an angel; that's you," taking her friend's arm and squeezing it penitentially against her side. "It is true, Bertha," more seriously. "You are my walking conscience. I would give anything to be the same quiet, dignified, every-day-alike kind of girl you are," ending with a sigh.

"Well, if people were all alike, the world would be a dull place," was Bertha's practical reply. "It is just because you are so bright and quick, so different every way from me, that I like you — only I can't bear to see" —

"There, there," Maggie interrupted, raising her

hand to check this return to a disagreeable subject. "Don't say another word. I'll do anything you ask."

They had reached the corner, where they said their good-byes and separated. Each had gone on but a few steps when Bertha turned and called her friend, and they slowly retraced their way towards each other.

"It's only about those slippers," she explained, apologetically. "I have a pair that I've outgrown; I'm getting to be such a monster — " shrugging her plump shoulders, "and if you can wear them" —

"It's not that," said Maggie, quickly, but with no hint of resentment. "I could have the slippers if I said so, but Sister Helen has made such a fuss about them. She says graduation day is getting to be nothing but a season of display; that the girls care only about their new dresses."

"Mamma says about the same thing. She didn't quite approve of the slippers, either; but she says I had better wear them if the rest do."

"Now, that isn't like Helen at all," said Maggie. "She would say that if the others wore them, that was a good reason why I shouldn't. She thinks I ought to stand up for the principle, but it is pretty hard standing up for a principle when" —

"When it isn't yours," the other finished, with a laugh. "Well, I don't believe it will make any difference. People are not coming there to look at our shoes."

"Oh, yes, they are," Maggie said, with hardened conviction. "What do you suppose they are coming

for — to listen to our essays? Well, to yours perhaps — but mine is nothing but a string of nonsense. I don't see how you ever did it, Bertha. Ten pages of blank verse. It would have killed me."

"Oh, I didn't find it so hard. It wasn't as if I had had to make it rhyme, and papa helped me, you know."

"I guess he didn't help you much," the other rejoined, bending forward and kissing her. "You're too honest for that. Good-bye." And they again parted.

Bertha Fay had only a few steps further to go before she reached the rectory. She was a young woman of quiet tastes and unstriking appearance, whose unadventurous spirit was likely to reap neither the gains nor penalties of a restless disposition like her friend's; and which might in time, assisted by certain physical tendencies, settle into moral lassitude. Though Maggie had called Bertha her "walking conscience," it was chiefly in recognition of that nicer sense of propriety in which she had been bred, and which Maggie would have liked the credit of possessing also. Neither of these young women had yet encountered any task or duty requiring the severe application of principle and a study of human motive, and the character of each was still under the shaping hand of circumstance.

CHAPTER II.

YOUNG HEARTS AND HEADS.

MAGGIE turned the corner and walked rapidly on her way. Her home was half a mile distant on a side street that ran through the village across the railroad tracks into the rich farming region beyond. It was a small frame house standing on a slight elevation just above the banks of the "Race," a narrow stream, running parallel to the railroad, built in the early settlement of the town to afford motive power to two or three flouring mills.

When Maggie spoke of her father as poor, it was in a relative sense. Thomas Dean had worked on the road as engineer several years, and was now foreman of the locomotive works located in the village. An intelligent machinist and a man of sober, industrious habits, he had been able, aided by the management of a capable wife, to save enough from his earnings to buy a home and lay up a few hundred dollars in the bank. When she was a child, her father's shop had been to Maggie a place of marvellous interest and delight; and many a runaway visit had she paid to it, to watch the big bellows, and fill her white apron with all manner of curious things, bits of sooty iron and shining black cinders, returning home covered with

grime and coal-dust, to be punished with a swift undressing and putting to bed.

Mrs. Dean, though she had married a man who was never free from it, abhorred dirt. An immaculate cleanliness reigned in her house from cellar to attic, suggesting the constant use of the scrubbing brush; yet there was nothing of the household drudge in Mrs. Dean's appearance. On the contrary, she wore the complacent air of one whose tasks are all performed and who has earned the leisure she enjoys. Less efficient housekeepers were apt to observe that Mrs. Dean's work seemed always done, no matter what time of the day or week you happened in there. There was never any hurry or bustle, any slipshod shoving of one day's tasks into the next. One Monday was exactly like another, with the clothes on the line at half past ten, the kitchen floor still damp in spots from the weekly mopping when Thomas Dean came home to dinner, invariably served from the remains of Sunday's roast. Mrs. Dean described these methods with the word "system." She had brought up her daughters to copy her ways in the smallest particulars, but Maggie was beginning to evince a growing restlessness under this discipline. As she grew towards young womanhood, she lost interest in the railroad shops; and the huge volumes of smoke issuing from the tall chimneys, together with the charred roadway beneath, afflicted her with a sense of injury and social ill-being every time she passed them. Maggie was just eighteen, an age when a bright and sensitive girl is quick to recognize whatever special

disadvantages inhere in her position, and strong in the belief in her power to overcome them. She was one of that large and inevitable class in our American civilization which illustrates both the merits and the difficulties of our peculiar principles; where the spectacle of social difference, based on divergent tastes and standards, may be seen in the two generations of a single household. The daughter of plain, uneducated parents, themselves belonging to a definite sphere, who with honest pride and ambition had fitted their children to occupy a very different one, Maggie felt herself at the same time both promised and cheated of the things she most desired.

She had looked her situation in the face many times and said to herself that, as the daughter of a workingman who wore a cotton blouse six days out of the seven, she had very little chance beside a girl like Laura Danvers, the only daughter of the wealthiest citizen in town; but she added that, as a girl with ten times more brains than Laura Danvers, — that was Maggie's moderate way of putting it, — she had a right to as fair a destiny as she. She had no feeling of special dislike towards Laura Danvers, who rather stood in her mind as the representative of certain social lines and distinctions she proudly believed herself able to overcome. It was not until lately, since her acquaintance with Sidney Gale, that the relation between the two young women had become more personal.

Maggie had not tried to define her feelings towards Sidney Gale, though she stood ready to admit, in

moments of serious reflection, that he was not to be compared with a steady and intelligent young man like Henry Parsons. But the persistent gravity which marked the behavior and conversation of this older acquaintance, together with the knowledge of his real feeling for her, wearied and sometimes irritated her, making the lighter image of young Gale, with his gay, chatty talk and graceful gallantries, appear in agreeable contrast. She had been unmistakably flattered by Gale's attentions. The knowledge that she had the power to attract one so favored and popular acted like a charm on her imagination, arousing a host of daring hopes and speculations, vaguely outlined but ardently cherished. Her friend Bertha's words had rudely dashed these hopes to the ground. Though dimly aware from the first of the equivocal nature of her new admirer's attentions, she would not before admit there was anything wrong or unbecoming in them. Now, however, she suddenly saw herself the object of that cheapened regard in others which never smites so keenly as where it reflects a shamed self-consciousness within. People were laughing and speaking lightly of her, saying that Sidney Gale was but amusing himself with her, while he reserved all serious feeling for his cousin Laura Danvers. Maggie was a proud, high-spirited girl, and, though without social experience, too intelligent not to understand the humiliating position in which she had placed herself. Vanity and caprice had combined to encourage a relation whose very secrecy had at first contributed an additional charm,

but which now threatened to cover her with reproach. She walked rapidly down the street, her cheeks burning with a sense of public exposure and shame, and strong in a sudden resolve to have nothing more to do with Sidney Gale.

On her way she had to pass a small, dilapidated cottage, with a group of unkempt children playing in front. It was the home of Pete Harmon, one of her father's workmen, a rough and dissolute character. A young woman about Maggie's age, poorly dressed, but with touches of cheap finery about her, was lazily swinging on the front gate. She looked at Maggie with a cool and smiling assurance.

"You've kept him waiting a good while," she said, in a drawling tone, with a hint of idle malice beneath.

Maggie flushed, and turned quickly towards her, a sharp retort on her lips, then, bethinking herself, and ashamed that she had let a girl like Molly Harmon see she had power to annoy her, raised her head proudly and went on her way. She could not dismiss this little incident from her mind, however, nor cover her own sense of folly and wrong-doing with angry contempt for another.

The hour was late, and she passed the place where Sidney Gale usually joined her with a feeling of grateful escape. This soon changed to humiliation as she reflected that perhaps he had not been there at all, but had purposely stayed away, and was now laughing at her with the rest of the world. She grew very angry, and said to herself that if she were to meet Mr. Gale that moment she would send him

promptly about his business. So fully determined was she in this, she began to regret he was not there, that she might put her resolution into instant effect. The next moment, fate showed itself ready for her dealing in the shape of a good-looking young man, smartly dressed in a new summer suit, who sprang from the grass on the roadside, and came smilingly towards her.

Maggie stopped short and gazed at him in undisguised dismay, mingled with a new, overpowering dread.

"At last!" the young man exclaimed, as he drew near. He turned back to accompany her, while Maggie's steps fell into a slow, indecisive gait as she struggled to collect herself, and regain the courage that now seemed to exhale with every breath, and ooze from her very finger-tips.

"What made you so late?" he went on, in an injured tone. "I didn't know they kept the older pupils after school. I've waited nearly two hours."

These words sent a little thrill of gratified vanity through his listener, despite her severe intentions. He had waited for her, then, — perhaps he really did care. But she meant not to give up her purpose, and, making a desperate effort, without pausing to think what she should say or how she should say it, she struck out blindly, speaking in a voice in which strong excitement and a strained formality were curiously blended.

"Mr. Gale, I have something to say to you."

He turned an inquiring face towards her, at the

same time extending his hand to relieve her of the book she carried; but this she would not permit, holding it pressed tightly against her, as if to keep down the frightened beating of her heart.

"I'm all attention," he said, in his light, ironic voice, as she continued silent. But now Maggie realized, with a new sense of shame, that she could never speak the words she had intended. What was there to say to Sidney Gale, any way? How could she, by forbidding him her society, reveal her distrust of him, and her knowledge of the unpleasant gossip connected with their names? After all, there was no real necessity; for quickly the rescuing thought flashed across her that this was the last day of school, the last afternoon that she might be found at a given hour walking down Taylor Street. This wavering purpose of our little heroine should not be too swiftly condemned. Maggie's instinct was better than her logic. Womanly delicacy and honor will often choose to ignore presumptuousness in an admirer, rather than admit a knowledge of the same by openly resenting it.

"It is nothing," she said, trying to speak in her usual manner, "I have changed my mind."

He bent a curious look on her. "You changed it pretty quick, but that's a woman's privilege. What are you walking so fast for?"

She murmured something about being late, but, not wishing to appear unusual, slackened her pace, while her companion, making a second attempt to relieve her of her book, was now passively permitted to take it from her.

"And so we graduate to-morrow," he began again. "What did you say the subject of your essay was? What a pity Dean doesn't begin with a letter lower down in the alphabet. Then I could come in late and escape the bore of listening to all the rest."

"Our names are not arranged in alphabetical order," said Maggie, lifting her head. "Mine comes near the end."

"Oh, then the arrangement is one of merit?"

"But I guess there are others you want to hear." Maggie guessed a good deal, the art of finished discourse imparted in a three years' course in a village high school being impaired by careless native habits.

"Laura Danvers' name is third on the programme," darting a significant look at the young man at her side. If there was a touch of malice in this, it passed unnoticed, Gale saying, only, in his most unconcerned manner, that he supposed he might as well see the thing through. He opened the book he was carrying, and began carelessly turning the leaves, his eyes resting, in amused scrutiny, on one of the blank pages covered with a schoolgirl's scribbled nonsense.

"This is the way young ladies employ their time in school, is it?" and he read, —

> "'A chance wind blew us together,
> The same may blow us apart.'"

"Mr. Gale, give me that book." She snatched it from him, while he laughed and yielded it. They had now reached the end of the sidewalk, and he placed his hand under her arm, in the free fashion of modern

youth, to help her across the railroad track. By a dexterous movement she freed herself from this support, walking silently by his side.

"Hullo, that's an interesting spectacle," he said, a moment after. She looked in the direction indicated, to a spot where two boys were fighting. The larger had thrown his companion to the ground and was mercilessly beating him with his clenched fists, while the air was filled with childish sobs and oaths. Maggie no sooner saw what was going on than she flew to the rescue. By main force she seized and dragged away the chief offender, sharply reprimanding him, and bidding him take himself home. With a sulky air he obeyed her, while she helped the other to rise, brushing the dust from his clothes, and giving him some wholesome advice, then sending him in the opposite direction. Gale stood looking on at this scene with an amused countenance.

"How can you laugh at a thing like that?" she reproached him, as he came up to her. "I think it is horrible to see boys fight. I wonder they don't kill each other."

"That is their amiable intention, no doubt, but they never get a fair chance. Some benevolent-minded person is always rushing in and preventing it. That is why the race of boys is destined never to grow smaller. It was as good as a show to see you with that young rascal. You are a whole moral education society in yourself."

"If you think the race of boys is too large, why did you let yourself grow up?"

"I thought that was an easier way of diminishing the species than getting killed. I hope you don't regret the decision," dropping into a sentimental tone. They had reached the bridge spanning the Race, and again he put his hand on her arm. "Come and look at the water," he said, and reluctantly she let herself be led down the grassy slope.

"I wonder if I've forgotten how to skip stones." He picked up a pebble and sent it flying upstream, where after a single ineffectual leap it plunged into the water and sank ignominiously to the bottom. Maggie greeted this exploit with a derisive laugh. "I can do better than that myself."

"Then perhaps you'll be good enough to try," flinging himself down on the grass. She hesitated a moment, then stooped, and, selecting the kind of stone she wanted, bent lightly above the water's edge, and sent it skimming over the surface, bending and dipping in its flight like a bird.

"That's very well done. Somebody taught you, I suppose."

"*Natürlich*," she replied, lightly, practising her three years' course in Ollendorf. "Henry Parsons taught me," she added, a moment after. It might be as well, she reflected, to let Sidney Gale know there were other young men in the world beside himself.

"Oh," with an incommunicable accent. "I know him. Nice young man — one of the self-made sort; poor but honest, and worships his Maker, I suppose, like the rest of us."

"He is my friend," Maggie interposed, with a flash of resentment.

"So I've heard," in a significant tone.

"What have you heard?" she demanded, turning quickly towards him, as he lay on the grass looking up at her with saucy assurance.

"I have heard that you are engaged to him," was the cool reply.

"It's not true. We're nothing but friends," but Maggie had no sooner uttered these words than she saw she had made an undignified mistake. Angry with herself and her companion, she could not resist the impulse to add another remark to the effect that she wished people would mind their own business.

"But they won't, you know," was the lazy reply.

"Well, I'm not the only one that's talked about," with a retaliating glance. "People say Laura Danvers is engaged."

"Yes, I've heard that too," the young man replied, as he rose from the ground and brushed the dust from his clothes. He assisted her up the bank, and continued to walk by her side across the bridge up to the house. He had never gone beyond the bridge before, and, in spite of her discomposure, Maggie could not help noting and making gratified comment on this circumstance.

"What is the matter with you?" he asked, in an aggrieved tone. "You have done nothing but quarrel with me. It's our last day, too."

This remark was unfortunate, containing the implication that, now these surreptitious meetings were

at an end, he should feel compelled to forego an acquaintance he was not yet ready to seek openly.

"We shall survive the separation, I dare say," she replied, with youthful sarcasm.

"You will survive. Girls are so heartless." He continued to talk in a sentimental strain, of mingled complaint and compliment, until they reached the gate, Maggie listening with alternate feelings of displeasure and pride, and trying to persuade herself that she had done him an injustice. He opened the gate for her, but continued to linger outside.

"Why have you never invited me to come to see you?" he asked, in an insinuating tone. Her face flushed with a pleased surprise, at the same time that she tried to look indifferent. "I dare say you have asked a lot of other fellows," he went on, in pretended pique. She gave a foolish little laugh at this, the assumption that there were a lot of other fellows to ask being not unpleasant.

"I can't ask you in to-night," she said. "It's supper time, and I have too much to do."

"Very well, then, I will take that as an invitation to come some other night, say next Thursday. That's prayer-meeting night. Do you go?"

Maggie was Episcopal bred, and said, no; but she quickly remembered that Laura Danvers did, a thought that served to check her hospitable impulses. Just then she caught sight of her father coming down the road, and, saying hurriedly, "I must go in now," she turned towards the house.

It was the apparent mixture of light and sincere

feeling in Sidney Gale that attracted Maggie. The easy grace of his manner pleased, while its occasional familiarity offended her. His ready wit spurred an answering quick intelligence on her part, which made conversation a delightful exercise, like acting a play. Maggie liked admiration, a pardonable fault when one is eighteen; but, better than this, she liked the knowledge that she had power to evoke admiration, and the sense of mastery such knowledge brings. Maggie was just at that age which rejoices most of all in the bright independence of youth, when new realms of conquest seem to lie on every hand, and the landscape of hope stretches all about us. She was impatient of all bonds that checked this feeling of happy self-assurance, and felt herself able to make wise use of the freedom she coveted. She was pleased with Gale's admiration, but would have been frightened and a little displeased at the signs of any deeper feeling, being at that point, in her young relish of life, when she found sufficient pleasure in the toothsome quality of things, not having experienced that hunger of the heart which craves a full feast. Her acquaintance with Sidney Gale had proved the most appetizing morsel she had yet tasted, but the knowledge that he, too, was likely to be satisfied with the same degree of enjoyment in their acquaintance imparted a bitter flavor to her own.

Gale walked rapidly back to the village, meeting Maggie's father near the bridge. The two men were unacquainted, though the younger knew that the heavy, stooping figure, clad in its soiled working

dress, was that of Thomas Dean, machinist and practical engineer. The latter, walking along in his slow, ruminative fashion, had not noticed a young man standing at his gate, and bestowed only a casual glance on Gale as he met him.

"To think of such a man being father to a girl like Maggie Dean," Gale said to himself, as he went on his way. "A fellow would have to be badly hit to take him for a father-in-law. It's an almighty shame. She's the prettiest girl in town, and sharper than chain lightning. Give her half a chance, and she would set all the rest mad with envy. What made her so offish to-day, I wonder," he added, musingly. "Somebody's been putting something into her head, perhaps." He stroked his mustache with a complacent smile, and then sighed. "Well, you can't expect one girl to have everything," his thoughts ran on. "If a girl has money and good manners, a fellow can put up with a little dulness." As he reached this sagacious conclusion, he reached the sidewalk also, and, stamping his feet to remove the dust from his polished boots, he shook himself free from disturbing thoughts, and went on his way with a jaunty air.

CHAPTER III.

DRESS REHEARSAL.

"WELL, young lady, where have you been all this time, and who do you suppose is going to finish this dress, while you go traipsing about town? Here's your father coming and the table not set."

This was the greeting Maggie received from her mother, who sat sewing by one of the windows that looked out on the porch. The tone was not as severe as the words, and Maggie seemed little disturbed, merely replying that she had been detained after school to rehearse. She hung her hat on a nail behind the door, then crossed the room and drew out a small, fall-leaf table into the middle of the floor, which she covered with a red table-cloth. Dinner hour with the Deans was at twelve o'clock, and the evening meal was a simple affair of cold meat, bread and butter, and some kind of sauce. Maggie distributed the plates round the table, then came over to her mother's side, to examine the progress of her work.

"Did you have enough lace?" she asked.

"Yes, I had enough," was the sententious reply. "I don't never want to see no more 'Valenseens edge,' if that's what you call it. I'm thankful you don't have to graduate but once."

"Well, mother, put it away now; I'll finish it after

supper." But Mrs. Dean declared she might as well go on now.

She would not, under any circumstances, have trusted a stitch of the work into other hands, as Maggie knew very well. She had ridiculed this "graduatin' business," as she called it, from the first, scolding Maggie for her extravagance, and complaining loudly over the added labor it brought on her, at the same time that she entered into it with her customary zest and efficiency. The truth was, she liked nothing better than an extra job of work, and she had made the whole of Maggie's dress, with its dozen flounces trimmed with lace, by hand. She held sewing-machines in poor esteem, declaring that they wasted the thread, and regarding them, together with most modern improvements, as among the devices to encourage the lazy and inefficient. This conservative instinct ran through all Mrs. Dean's house-keeping. She would have liked to cook her meals at an open fire-place, with a bake-kettle, as her mother had done before her; and stood conspicuous among her village acquaintance for her refusal to use a reservoir stove. "I always have het my dish water in a kettle, and I guess it won't hurt me to do so now," was the answer she gave to her husband's mild suggestion that perhaps she had better get one.

Mrs. Dean was still in her prime, with a trim figure, clear skin, and decisive features. She was as blunt in speech as independent in opinion, yet by no means an ill-natured woman. She never took part in the village gossip, the usual feminine resource in

a small town, finding it more tiresome than exciting to occupy herself in far-fetched conjectures on the conduct of her neighbors. This indifference to the affairs of other people was accompanied by a corresponding security in regard to her own. The supposition that any one of her family could be talked about or lay themselves liable to injurious suspicion never crossed her mind. She knew that Sidney Gale, a young man with whom none of the rest of the family were acquainted, had walked home with Maggie several times of late; but the knowledge had not troubled her, nor even aroused her curiosity. Maggie was young and pretty, and it was natural, she supposed, that young men should like to be with her. There were others besides Sidney Gale who had walked home with her. As for marrying, Mrs. Dean was not a woman who detected a possible son-in-law in every masculine acquaintance. She supposed, indeed hoped, that Maggie would some day marry Henry Parsons, but she had never urged her daughter on the subject, shrewdly guessing that she might hinder more than help the end she desired. As her daughters grew in years, she withdrew herself more and more from active superintendence of their affairs. Like many women of her class, she possessed much mental inertia along with her physical activity. The material labor and care expended on her children, when they were young, had been easy and pleasant to her, but she had as little taste for as understanding of deeper needs incurred in their growing years.

"I don't bother my girls with much advisin'," she

said. "Let 'em take their own way, I say, and they'll learn better all the quicker."

Maggie must have inherited her social ambitions from a remote ancestry, for her mother had not a spark of any such feeling, which could only have sprung from acknowledged discontent with her present condition. Mrs. Dean knew, of course, there were women who lived differently from herself, wore finer clothes, and had servants to wait on them; but it never occurred to her that this difference redounded to their credit or to her special disadvantage. Hers was one of those narrow, egotistic natures, which is supremely content with itself under all circumstances. If fate had assigned her a place among the rich and cultured, she would have been scarcely more conscious of her merits than she was now as the wife of an industrious mechanic, who worked for weekly wages. As a master of his trade and the boss workman of his shop, Mrs. Dean found enough in her husband to satisfy the ambition of any reasonable woman, especially when she compared him with some of his associates, lazy, dissolute fellows, like Pete Harmon, who spent all they earned and kept their families on the verge of poverty. If she had had a boy — and she thanked her stars she had not, boys tracked the house up so, and were so hard to manage — she didn't know that she could have asked anything better for him than to go into the shop as his father had done. It was well enough to send the girls to school. There didn't seem to be anything else to do with them. School finished, she would

have had them settle down quietly at home to help her with the housework and do their own sewing, but she had met a conflicting opinion on this point, in her elder daughter, who had studied book-keeping, and now held a position in the leading dry-goods store of the town.

Helen Dean had inherited a will as strong as her mother's, encased in a quiet exterior like her father's. She was six years older than Maggie, and entered the house while the latter was setting the table. Removing her hat and light wrap, she disclosed a taller figure than Maggie's, with a hint of her father's ruggedness in the firm-set shoulders, marked by the further contrast of dark hair and eyes. Her face was of grave expression, but had a look of intelligence and good sense. She handed a small package to her sister, a roll of satin ribbon, intended for the final decoration of the latter's dress, and Maggie and her mother were soon absorbed in its arrangement, looping and fastening it in place to try the effect.

Thomas Dean entered from the kitchen, where he had stopped to wash himself and take off his blouse, revealing a shirt of blue print beneath. He always entered the house by the back door, an insignificant circumstance perhaps, yet which reflected a good deal of the man's nature. Though he was, essentially, master of his own house — Mrs. Dean would have scorned the idea of being wife to any other kind of man — it was natural that one of his slow and unobtrusive manner should seem a figure of secondary importance beside his bustling wife. He seated him-

self at the table, and waited a few moments for the others to take their places.

"Maggie set the table, didn't she?" he asked, in a patient tone.

"Why, what's wanting?" that young lady demanded, wheeling about with a convicted look.

"Well, I gen'ally eat with a knife," a statement which conveyed the literal truth, as he seemed to find no use for the brightly scoured, three-tined instrument Maggie laid down with its accompanying blade of steel.

"And while you're about it, you might get some bread," he added, in the same uncomplaining tone. Maggie flushed, and bit her lip, retiring to the pantry, whence she returned, bearing a plate heaped with wide slices of the lightest and whitest article of its kind.

"Well, she didn't forget the napkins," said Mrs. Dean, as she took her place. "Maggie always puts them on the first thing, but I never did think napkins very good eatin' myself, even when they're fringed."

"Oh, mother!" exclaimed Maggie, in petulant protest against a kind of joking she was tired of.

Napkins were a comparatively new feature among the table appointments at the Deans', where much coaxing from Maggie had made a place for them. Mrs. Dean held this, as every other innovation on their established ways, in high scorn, but, now that the change had been effected, she was beginning to take a little secret pride in the regular appearance of each napkin at its appropriate plate, though she

made a shamefaced use of her own. Maggie's, it is needless to say, had become indispensable to her, and the small, silver ring in which it was enclosed, a birthday present from her sister, did much to impart that element of mental content which hygienists tell us is of dietary importance. A ring of plain ivory sufficed her sister's needs, who used it in a natural manner, as if she had always been used to it. So too — Maggie reflected with some discontent — she would have gone without it, had circumstances required, as if she had always been used to that too. Nothing seemed to make much difference to Helen, who had a way of carrying herself above those little things, which entered so largely into Maggie's scheme of happiness.

Maggie held her sister in affectionate awe, loving and trusting her more than any one else, at the same time that she rebelled against her authority. In spite of her inexperience, Maggie had her own faculty of shrewd judgment concerning the people she met. Helen might be a book-keeper in a store, who wore plain prints in summer, and plainer cashmere in winter, with a black silk for Sundays; yet it was easy to see that there was no finer lady in town than she, so nice and careful in all her habits, so dignified in her manner, never doing foolish, irreparable things, which made her cheeks burn to think of afterwards, as she, Maggie, was always doing. It frightened Maggie to think what Helen would say if she knew of her walks with Sidney Gale, and she wondered what special grace of Providence or chance had kept her

mother's lips silent on the subject in her elder daughter's presence; but she said to herself that, as long as her mother knew she was guilty of no real concealment, adding that sisters were not bound to tell each other everything any way. She knew that Helen considered her as good as engaged to Henry Parsons, — Helen had such old-fashioned notions on some subjects, — but Maggie said to herself that she knew best whether she was engaged or not, and that she shouldn't marry Henry Parsons unless she wanted to.

Thomas Dean ate his supper with an anxious and preoccupied air, which only Helen noticed.

"Has anything gone wrong at the Works, father?" she asked.

He sighed and pushed his chair back from the table. "Pete Harmon's on another spree," he said.

"Well, I must say, Mr. Dean," his wife exclaimed, "that if I was foreman of them Works, I'd ship Pete Harmon pretty quick." As this was an observation that Mrs. Dean made on an average six or seven times a year, it did not produce any startling effect.

"It would be hard for father to do that," said Helen, in her quiet tone. "He has to think of the family."

"They're a poor, shiftless set," her mother replied. "It was only yesterday his wife was in here to borrow some yeast. If I've lent her my rule for making yeast once, I have fifty times. Yet she's always buying baker's yeast. I don't know what you can

expect of such people. Then, she sets here and cries because Pete don't use her well, and she ain't got but one calico dress. She says my girls are too stuck-up to be seen with hers, and that it ain't their fault they've got a drunken father."

"Well, I expect that's so," said Mr. Dean.

"I think she's very meddlesome and impertinent," said Maggie, "and I wish she'd keep away from here." No one heeded this little outburst, and she picked up a pile of plates and went into the kitchen.

"She was at the Works this afternoon, begging me not to discharge Pete," Mr. Dean went on. "She says they haven't had any potatoes in the house for a week."

"Well, they had some for supper to-night, I'll warrant," his wife observed, "and I guess you know where she got the money to pay for them, Mr. Dean." Her husband looked foolish. "I only give her half a dollar," he said.

"I thought so," his discerning mate replied, in a pitying tone. "Now, we've got a lot of potatoes in the cellar — you always do lay in too large a supply — they're all runnin' to sprouts, and it's time for the new ones too. You'd much better told her to send that big, lazy boy of hers round here to sprout them on shares."

"I can do that to-morrow," said Mr. Dean, in a cheerful tone, pleased at the unexpected opportunity of doing another kindness, for there was still an unrelieved burden on his mind. Mrs. Dean repeated her advice, that the sooner he got rid of the

troublesome Pete the better. "I wonder you can have it on your conscience, Mr. Dean, to encourage such folks."

"I've ben thinking of that," her husband replied. "I wouldn't promise to take Pete back. I told her I was gettin' tired; 'n' so I be, I'm gettin' tired," with a long-drawn sigh. "Besides, it ain't fair. I tried to make her see that too, but I guess she didn't, she cried so."

"Oh, cried!" Mrs. Dean interrupted, with an impatient toss of her head.

"Now, there's George Martin out of work, and he's a good honest man, never touched a drop, and he's got a family to support too. Seems clear as daylight George ought to have the place, yet, when I think of Mary Harmon and the children, I ain't so sure of it." He bent his head in a few moments' troubled reflection.

"Of course, George ought to have the place," said his wife. "You might as well pour water through a sieve as try to help a man like Pete Harmon."

"I don't know," her husband replied, doubtfully. "Some folks seem put into this world just to give other folks a chance to take care of 'em, to make us patient and forbearin' like. They're just like babies, trouble nor nothin' don't seem to teach 'em better. They can't never walk on their own feet, so to speak. We just have to pick 'em up and carry 'em along. Pete Harmon's that kind."

"Then, you don't mean to discharge him and hire George Martin?" Helen asked. She had put on her

bonnet to return to the store, and stood waiting. Maggie had come in from the kitchen and stood looking at him also.

"Yes, I do," her father answered, with quiet resolve. "'Tain't fair to slight a man because he's deservin', in the hope he'll get his share some way. 'Twould be like refusin' to smell a flower because it's got a sweeter scent than a turnip. I shall give George Martin the place to-morrow," rising slowly from his chair. "But we must find something else for Pete to do. I guess I'll get him to help me in the garden."

"Well, Thomas Dean, mark my words, there'll be trouble come out of this," said his wife.

"Why, mother, you just said father ought to discharge him," Maggie reproved her.

"Don't make no difference," her father replied. "When you know a thing's right, you've got to do it, trouble or no trouble. If I was to spend my time thinkin' what's goin' to happen next week, I'd never get anything done to-day; but we must take care of Pete some way." He sighed again, and went out into the garden. Helen left the house at the same time. Mrs. Dean put the last stitches in the dress, while Maggie washed the dishes in a thoughtful mood. It was not the first time that words like these had raised a new feeling of wonder and respect for her father. She said to herself that there was not a better man in the world than he, not even the minister, yet there were people who slighted and looked down on him. A feeling of loving pride swelled in her heart,

mingled with indignation. Along with these feelings arose one of irritation over the implication in Mrs. Harmon's talk that her family and the Deans were on an equal footing, and that Maggie's natural companion was a rude and ignorant girl like Molly Harmon. It did not allay Maggie's displeasure in reflections of this kind that other people felt in the same way — Laura Danvers, for instance; but she was at that age when every obstacle to youthful happiness and ambition seems insignificant compared with the hopeful belief in our own power to overcome the same. Maggie meant to make her own future, to prove herself independent of accidental circumstances; and to-morrow was graduation day, which she felt certain would be signalized by some new triumph and proof of her power to please and win what she desired.

Her work finished, she went into the parlor with her mother to try on the dress. This was a long process, but Maggie felt that its pains were amply rewarded by the sight of the figure confronting her in the little gilt mirror; its girlish slimness, freshly tinted complexion, and sunny hair being admirably set off by the folds of soft muslin that fell to her feet, flowing backwards in an ample train. The satin ribbon gleamed palely on its snowy background, and the ripple of lace that completed the costume at neck and elbows nestled lovingly against a skin as pure in texture as itself.

"I don't know whether to wear gloves or not," said Maggie, stretching forth a pretty hand and round white arm, and turning them about, as she debated

whether the stylish effect of a six-buttoned glove was not likely to hide a greater charm.

"Oh, you'd better go the whole figger, now you've begun," said her mother.

Just then Thomas Dean, entering the house, came and stood in the doorway, his figure leaning heavily against the casing as he surveyed with mild interest the scene within.

"Won't you come in?" Maggie asked.

"Don't look as if I could get in," he answered, with a touch of his wife's humor. Mrs. Dean snickered audibly.

"I should think as much. 'Tain't none of my doin's, that ain't," pointing to the muslin train.

"Must have cost something, a dress like that," her husband observed, in incurious comment, as if the fact only remotely concerned him.

"It didn't cost ten dollars," Maggie hastened to reply. "The ribbon is the most expensive thing about it. The rest is only shilling muslin."

"Dreadful sleazy stuff, too," said her mother, taking a piece between her thumb and finger to test its quality. "There'll be nothing but a string left when it's washed."

"Who wants it washed?" said Maggie. "Of course, I shall only wear it to parties and such places." She spoke with the air of one who already had several engagements on hand, while her father turned back into the other room, giving place to his older daughter, who had returned from the store. Entering the room, Helen seated herself, with

a tired movement, on the nearest chair, drawing off her gloves and looking at Maggie with a forbidding expression.

"Don't you like it?" the other asked, rather timidly.

"Have you thought how you are going to get to the schoolhouse in a dress like that?" was the reply.

"Yes, that's what I should like to know," put in Mrs. Dean.

"I should think I might have a carriage for once," said Maggie, crossly. "Of course, I can't walk through the dust and over that dirty railroad track."

"The hacks always charge double fare coming out here," said Mrs. Dean.

"That's because we live so far away from everything," said Maggie, with growing discontent. "I don't see why we can't live in town, like other folks."

"You'd ought to told us before," her mother answered. "We can't very well sell out and move before mornin'." Mr. Dean, attracted by the sound of their voices, came again and stood in the doorway.

"Here's Maggie thinks she ought to have a hack to ride to the schoolhouse," his wife went on, in her most sarcastic tone. "She'll be wantin' a striped canerpy next, and a piece of carpet to walk on."

Mr. Dean deliberated the subject a moment. "Well, why not? Let her have the hack, if she wants it."

Mrs. Dean tossed her head as much as to say it was no business of hers, while a look of thankful happiness lighted up Maggie's face.

"Oh, thank you, father," she said, in as fervent a tone as if he had bestowed some real benefit on her. Her heart went out to him in a little gush of gratitude, and she recalled other occasions when he had come to her assistance like this, giving his fatherly sanction to some girlish wish or fancy which her mother only ridiculed and her sister opposed. She thought, with a little compunction, that she was not as good to her father as she ought to be, who was always good to her, though he passed days sometimes without apparent notice of her. It was this little feeling of contrition and wish to make amends that led her to pause at his side on her way upstairs and say, "You're coming to see me graduate to-morrow, father, aren't you?" An abashed smile rose to his face, and he made no reply.

"All the other girls' fathers will be there," Maggie went on, with a slight pout.

"For land's sake, child, stop teasing your father. Do you suppose he wants to lose half a day's work just to see a lot of girls with long trains? He'd feel like a fish out of water."

Thomas Dean colored at these words, and he reflected on this view of the subject a moment. "Well, I'll see," he said, at last; "but I guess that your mother's about right. I guess it ain't much of a place for me." He looked down at his daughter with a expression of mingled embarrassment and doubt. It was hard to realize that this blooming young woman with her flowing draperies, easy manners, and that wonderful range of book knowledge which

was to receive its reward in a diploma, was his little Maggie, who used to run to meet him on his way home from the shop, and be lifted to his shoulder for a ride. The change seemed to pain as well as puzzle him, and he turned away with a troubled look on his honest face, as of one who has lost something, through no fault of his own, which he knows not how to regain.

Maggie and her sister climbed the narrow stairway to their room. The latter was simply furnished, and with fewer ornaments than are usually found in girls' rooms. Maggie took off her dress, and put it carefully away in a spare room across the hall, then, standing before the glass, with uncovered neck and arms, began the important task of crimping her hair. Helen, who wore her hair in its natural plainness, yielded the whole of the dressing-bureau, and made her preparations for the night on the other side of the room.

"Aren't you going to-morrow, either?" Maggie asked, in a complaining tone, as if her father's failure to promise attendance had cast that of the entire family in doubt.

"Of course," was the reply. "I shall take mother."

"Why, can't she ride with me?" Maggie asked; but, even as she spoke, she saw the scornful look with which her mother would receive such a proposition.

"That will not be necessary. We are to call for Miss Graham." There was nothing especially offen-

sive in these words, but something in the speaker's tone and manner irritated Maggie.

"I know you think it is very silly in me to have a carriage at all." There was no reply to this, and Maggie's sense of injury increased. There is no more trying partner in a quarrel than a silent one.

"I suppose I can take my things to Bertha Fay's, and dress there."

"That is nonsense. You will dress at home, as you should."

Maggie threw back the braid she had just finished, with a spirited motion, not unlike a young colt's, who sees a wiser way of managing himself than his owner is trying.

"Then, of course, I shall have to ride."

"I have made no objection to your riding. One piece of folly usually leads to another."

"You call it a piece of folly, I suppose, my having a new dress with a few flounces on it. You would like me to wear my old check silk." Again there was silence in the little chamber.

"I'm sure I don't want a carriage," Maggie rushed on, in a trembling voice. "I wish I had never seen the dress. I wish I wasn't going to graduate. I hate the whole thing—I—"

"Maggie!"

"It's true. I wish I had never been born, and it is you who make me feel so. You make everything harder for me." Here her voice broke in an angry little sob.

"I make everything harder for you?" her sister repeated, in surprise.

"Just because I'm younger than you, and like tó have a good time, you think me silly and vain. You want me to be dignified and indifferent, like you; but I can't, and I don't want to. I can't help liking things and wanting to be in them, and that is what makes you look down on me and despise me."

Maggie had given utterance to this impetuous outbreak in a series of interjectional phrases, choking down her outraged feelings, which now gave way to a burst of tears, in which all the disturbed emotions of the day found vent. She threw herself on the bed, and, burying her face on the pillow, cried for a few moments without restraint, while her sister, with a contrite and alarmed face, tried to quiet her.

"Hush, Maggie, they will hear you downstairs."

"You are mistaken," she began again, as Maggie grew a little calmer, "if you think I want to make things harder for you. I only want you to act like a sensible girl. If a thing is right, we should not stop to ask whether it is hard or not;" but this was a kind of stoicism Maggie felt unable to practise. It seemed to her much more reasonable that, when a thing is discovered to be hard, one should set to work to see if it be really necessary. Maggie had all of youth's distaste for basing its own action on the melancholy experience of other people, and preferred to gain her own as she went along. There was no formal peace-making between the two sisters, who always preserved an undemonstrative manner towards each other; but Helen's next act had the effect to reinstate herself in the other's good will. Waiting until Maggie

had grown quiet and resumed her preparations for the night, she handed her a paper package. "Miss Graham sent you this," she said.

"Miss Graham!" Maggie exclaimed in surprise. "Oh, how perfectly lovely!" as, opening the parcel, she found a white silk fan inside, edged with curling feathers, and mounted on a carved ivory frame. "Miss Graham, of all people in the world!" she went on, bending over her treasure, and opening and shutting it with the pleased look of a child. "I can't think how she came to do it. It must be because I'm Helen's sister," smiling through her wet eyelashes. "It's real ivory, isn't it," examining the frame more minutely.

"It's real if Miss Graham had anything to do with it. You must write a note and thank her."

"In my very best hand," Maggie replied, gayly, "and I will put in something from Emerson, whom she is continually quoting. Something about 'consistency's being the hobgoblin of little minds.'"

"I don't think I would do that," Helen answered, doubtfully.

"Why, of course not," Maggie made impatient reply. She found her sister's literalness rather trying at times.

"I don't think she means to be inconsistent—"

"Oh, she may be as inconsistent as she likes, if this is the way she does it; and I did want a fan. I don't care so much about the slippers," in generous excuse of the opposition she had met on this point.

"The slippers," Helen repeated, with a little em-

barrassment. "Oh, yes, they're on the table," indicating a white paper box on the table near by. Maggie opened her eyes in the greatest astonishment, then, with excited fingers, untied the string, and took out a pair of white slippers. She said not a word, only turned and looked at her sister. She was completely bewildered.

"Mother thought you might as well have them," Helen explained, with a convicted air.

"Well!" Maggie drew a long breath. A sudden scheme of magnanimous retaliation had occurred to her, prompted by a compunctious feeling of not deserving all the goodness she was receiving, and of having done everybody injustice.

"I shall not wear them," she said, heroically, replacing them in the box and shutting down the cover.

"Why not?"

"I don't care anything about them. At least, I don't care so much about them, now that I know I can have them." She laughed at this way of putting it. "I mean I think just as you do — they're silly." This was not perfectly honest, perhaps, but, at least, it was generous.

"But if all the other girls wear them," Helen said, repeating an argument she had heard before.

"What do I care for that?" said Maggie, lifting her head; and, indeed, at the present moment she felt that she cared very little. A sudden desire to show herself independent and above the trivial motives that sometimes ruled her had seized her. She no longer felt that she wanted to do everything

as everybody else did, and the resolve grew stronger to do something quite different.

"No, I shall not wear them," she repeated. "I shall not let you go to that expense," she added, explainingly.

"Just as you please. It was not the expense I thought of."

"I know that," Maggie answered, hastily, "but I shall not wear them. Don't let's talk about it. But I shall carry the fan," she added, returning to the dressing-bureau, and taking up her new possession. "Miss Graham is a dear. I will never laugh at her or her blue crape shawl again."

CHAPTER IV.

WHITE MUSLIN AND A DIPLOMA.

GRADUATION day dawned as fair as the youthful hopes of those who had so long watched its coming. The class numbered some of the most popular young people in town, and the occasion was one of general festivity. At two o'clock the school hall was crowded with an expectant audience, which kept up a lively conversation in a subdued tone, while a hundred gayly colored fans fluttered in the air, adding to the general stir and excitement. The room was decorated with flowering shrubs, and the class motto, *Fides et Patientia*, in large lettering of arbor vitæ, ornamented the plastered wall behind the teacher's desk. The chairs on the right were occupied by the members of the board and other distinguished visitors. It was little past the appointed hour, and the audience was growing impatient, when the door of a recitation room opened and Principal Marsh came out, followed by the members of the class, the two assistants bringing up the rear of the procession. The class consisted of eight young women and two young men. The young women were all in white, and the black-coated figures of the young men stood out in marked contrast against that mass of billowy

muslin. They wore a constrained and rather apologetic air, as if aware of their comparative insignificance and the small share of public interest their presence created. The exercises were opened with prayer, after which one of the amateur vocalists of the village sang, "How so fair," using the Italian words; the audience, though it did not understand a syllable, listening in a state of high gratification at this exhibition of native talent. The programme proper then began with an oration by one of the young men, whom the audience heard patiently, giving a round of friendly applause at the close, then bending eagerly forward to catch sight of the next comer. Interest in the proceedings increased when Laura Danvers' turn came. It had been at her own request that her name appeared thus early on the programme, and not, as Maggie had unjustly intimated, because of inferior scholarship. It was characteristic of her to manifest no desire to obtain any of the honors for which others were eagerly striving. Her essay was short, but sensible and well written. When she descended from the platform her passage was blocked by two ushers bearing a number of floral tributes in their arms, the most conspicuous of which was a basket of roses, of a large and expensive variety, with card attached bearing the dashing signature of Sidney Gale. The hour was late and the audience growing weary when Maggie's turn came. She ascended the platform with an assured step, and, after saluting the audience with the profound courtesy she had spent an hour in practising the day before, took one slow look around the

room. For she had made up her mind to accustom herself to the situation before she began, not to be frightened nor to scramble through her reading in the breathless fashion of some of the others. As her eyes wandered over the sea of faces, which, despite her resolution, swam in a confused mass before her, she singled out five from the rest. The first which she recognized, with much surprise, was her father's. He had been unable to remain away, and, exchanging his work-day dress for his Sunday best, now stood leaning against the wall at one end of the room, in an awkward position, his eyes fastened on Maggie with the same half proud, half timorous look of the evening before. Turning her eyes from him, they fell next on her mother and sister sitting in the rear of the room, Mrs. Dean leaning back in her seat and fanning herself with a complacent air, and Helen regarding her with an anxious look. The next instant, she found herself looking full into the bold, handsome eyes of Sidney Gale, who regarded her with smiling ease and an expression that spoke of some near understanding between them. Turning hastily away, she was confronted by another pair of eyes, dark, grave, with a troubled look in their depths. Maggie had not before discovered the presence of Henry Parsons, though she supposed he was there. As she began to read, it was this last look more than any other that penetrated her consciousness, holding her with some spell of its own, so that at the close she involuntarily turned to meet it again; but only to note that it had grown more gloomy than before, and that

its owner took no part in the applause all the rest were awarding her. Maggie's essay, which she had described as "a string of nonsense," was entitled "People's Follies." She treated her theme with girlish satire and wit, passing in review the social foibles of the day, in a sparkling and good-natured style, that delighted the audience, grateful for this unexpected chance of being amused, and won round after round of applause. Maggie had not expected any flowers, scorning, as we have seen, to take any precautionary measures to obtain these marks of favor, and secure in her belief that she should be able to create an impression and win her share of the day's honors without that shallow artifice. Her surprise was the more real, and her pleasure the keener, when one of the ushers advanced with a good-sized armful. Among them was a basket of roses from her sister Helen, an assorted bouquet from Mrs. Fay, and a cluster of fragrant hot-house blooms from an unknown source. But there are some kinds of ignorance that throw as clear a light on what we want to know as the most definite knowledge, and a quickened heart-beat would have told Maggie the source of this particular offering even if, just before seating herself in her place, she had not raised her eyes to meet those of young Gale, piercing her with that same look of implied understanding. It shamed more than it flattered her, though she could not prevent the rush of hot blood to her cheeks. The difference between her position and that of Laura Danvers smote her with acute mortification, and she said to herself that she

would seize the first occasion to punish Sidney Gale's presumption as it deserved.

The valedictory, by Bertha Fay, was followed by an address from the president of the board and the presentation of diplomas.

The crowd slowly dispersed, many people going forward to extend congratulations to the graduates. Sidney Gale advanced to the charge with a smiling countenance, bestowing an impartial hand-shake all round, with a suggestive pressure for Maggie, which received no response of answering look or touch, that young lady being apparently absorbed in other matters; not so deeply, however, but that she noticed how Gale, his other duties performed, stationed himself at his cousin's side, relieving her of her flowers and other *impedimenta*, and waiting to escort her home.

Thomas Dean had been among the first to leave the schoolhouse, waiting outside for his wife, who joined him in a few minutes, alone, Helen having gone in another direction with Miss Graham. They walked silently down the street for a space, Mrs. Dean moderating her brisk pace to suit the heavy, uneven gait of her husband.

"Maggie was the smartest of 'em all," he said, at length, turning towards his wife with a look of shy pleasure mantling his rude features.

"She's smart enough," the other replied, in a manner that seemed to hold a reserved opinion. As a matter of fact, Mrs. Dean was greatly pleased with Maggie's success, but she was not going to make a foolish demonstration of this feeling. Others might

praise Maggie and laugh at her nonsense, but she was not going to compromise herself by too outspoken admiration for her own child.

"I could hardly make out 'twas Maggie," her husband continued, rubbing his bristly cheek with his hand. "Don't seem no more 'n yesterday sence she was runnin' round the house, cuttin' up all manner of shines an' havin' her little tantrums."

"Um — she has her tantrums yet," Mrs. Dean answered. Her husband did not quite understand the drift of this remark, turning a questioning face towards her. He had come to feel so poorly acquainted with his daughters of late that he naturally relied on their mother, who stood in much nearer relation to them, for the knowledge he was unable to gain for himself. Not until the evening before had this separation oppressed him with a sense of definite loss and mistake somewhere. He knew Helen better than Maggie, for she paid him more attention, reading the newspaper to him and interesting herself in his work at the shop; but Maggie had always been his favorite child. From her babyhood he had always shielded and taken her part against the more vigorous discipline she received from her mother.

"You mustn't be too hard on her," he urged, in his mild tone. "She wouldn't be your daughter and so much of a Weatherby as she is if she hadn't a bit of spunk." Mrs. Dean was as proud of being a Weatherby as if the family had armorial bearings.

"I guess I ain't very hard on her. If a girl ain't old enough to take care of herself at eighteen, she

never will be." This sentiment seemed to strike the listener with doubt, who began again to stroke his rough cheek thoughtfully, bending his brows together in some painful inward scrutiny. It was not easy for him to measure the merit of an abstract proposition at any time, but something in the sound of this one gave him an uneasy feeling, and struck him as of the wrong quality. He wondered if this general remark referred to any special act of Maggie's: she had done something that displeased her mother, perhaps, who, instead of punishing her as she would once have done, had simply washed her hands of her. The thought of his bright, innocent Maggie left alone, unsupported by any older intelligence than her own, gave him a deep pang.

"Maggie's a good girl, ain't she?" he asked, in an anxious tone.

"Well, Thomas Dean, what's come over you?" his wife exclaimed. "She's good enough, of course. I guess there ain't much danger of my girls bein' anything else; but she's dreffle flighty and set up in some of her notions."

"You mean about the hack?" he said, a look of relief spreading over his face. "That's all right. Young folks will be young folks. I ain't the man to begrudge my girls an extra dollar now and then." A new thought struck him. "She'll be riding home, I expect," stopping to look back, as if Maggie was about to ride by in triumphal procession. "Why didn't you wait and ride too?" he asked his wife.

"Yes, I think I see myself! I guess I'm able to walk a spell yet."

They walked on in silence a few minutes; then Mr. Dean, who was in an unusually loquacious mood, spoke again.

"P'r'aps we'd ought to gone up an' spoke to her."

"Well, I wasn't goin' to push my way through all that crowd just to shake hands with a string of girls. I'm all het through now," and Mrs. Dean threw her *broché* shawl back from her shoulders.

"P'r'aps she was expecting it, though," the father urged.

"P'r'aps she was," was the calm reply.

Just then they heard a rapid footstep behind, and a voice called Mr. Dean by name. Turning, they confronted a tall, dark-skinned young man, who was hastening to overtake them.

"It's Henry Parsons," and "How are you, Henry?" were the greetings he received as he drew near and the two men shook hands.

"Be'n to see the graduatin'?" Mrs. Dean asked.

"Yes," he answered absently.

"They're goin' to have some more doin's to-night: I suppose you'll stay in."

"You mean the *alumni* meeting. Yes, I have to take part."

"Well, then, you'd better come right on home with us," said Mr. Dean, in a friendly tone. "Have you seen Maggie?"

"I couldn't get near her," the other replied, almost angrily. "There was such a crowd of people."

Mrs. Dean laughed in a way that nettled his nerves still more, then repeated her husband's invitation. The young man hesitated, and murmured some excuse.

"Why, of course you'll come," said Mr. Dean, taking his arm. "Maggie'll expect you."

Henry Parsons was by no means sure of this, but the words had a persuasive effect; and, taking his place on the other side of Mrs. Dean, the three went on together.

It was an hour later when Maggie descended the schoolhouse steps, accompanied by two or three young gentlemen. She was all smiles and happiness, and seated herself in the clumsy hack, which stood waiting for her, with the air of an empress. Her companions openly vied with each other in their attentions, placing her flowers and papers on the seat before her, and lifting their hats with admiring looks as she nodded a gracious farewell. Leaning back on the cushioned seat with a smile still on her face, she took a rapid review of the events of the day. The flattering looks and words bestowed on her redoubled their charm as she recalled them in memory. There was no doubt she had made a genuine hit.

"What a little satirist you are, Maggie!" people had laughingly said to her, declaring they should be quite afraid of her after this. A few had whispered in her ear that she looked the prettiest of any one in the class; and Judge Foster, the president of the board, had asked for an introduction to her, and spoken a few words of honest praise, adding, with a

good-natured smile, that she mustn't be too hard on them all, — she would grow up sometime, and be no wiser than the rest of them.

All this had been as sweetest incense to Maggie; and she seemed borne on wings as she gathered up her treasures and sprang from the carriage, running up the walk to the side porch, where her father, who had relieved himself of his Sunday coat, and was resting in the easy freedom of his shirt-sleeves, sat with Henry Parsons. Maggie was in such good humor with all the world that it was impossible it should not overflow and sweeten her greeting to their visitor. Crossing the piazza, she gave him her hand with a beaming smile, and entered the house. It had come to be a matter of doubt with Henry Parsons, of late, how Maggie would behave to him; and when, as now, she proved kinder than he had dared to hope, a feeling of unreasoning gladness took possession of him. Rising and standing to one side to allow her trailing skirts passage before him, he followed her into the house. The parlor door was open, in honor, doubtless, of the festive character of the day; and Maggie passed directly in there to deposit her flowers, gloves, etc., on the table, and take an examining glance at herself in the little gilt mirror. Parsons came slowly to her side, and extended his hand for the second time.

"What for?" she asked, as she placed hers in it.

"I thought you might like to receive my congratulations too."

"Oh!" laughing, and withdrawing the hand he seemed willing to retain.

"Though I don't know but one might get tired of that sort of thing after a while."

"Not I," was the frank reply. "When there are pleasant things to be said to people, I don't care how many fall to my share."

"I suppose not," with a constrained smile, "only one wants to be pretty sure the pleasant things are sincerely spoken."

Maggie raised her eyebrows at this. Henry Parsons was a young man who, without intending to be rude or disagreeable, employed a painful honesty of speech that often made him seem both. There was no one who would have been better pleased with Maggie's success than himself, had he been sure of its effect on her.

"That means, I suppose," said Maggie, with a little pout, "that you think I do not deserve any praise. You did not like my essay."

"Oh, yes, I liked it! and I don't mean that you do not deserve the praise you have received. I should like to know who praises you in his thought more than I do." He checked himself, mindful that his words were leading in a forbidden direction. "Of course," he went on, putting aside more serious thoughts, and coming back to the surface talk Maggie liked better, "that way of putting a subject is always one-sided. It was exaggerated, but I suppose you meant that, — and the style seemed to me a little verbose, — there were a good many adjectives" —

"Oh, mercy!" Really it was trying, after having been told a dozen times that she had written the brightest essay of all, and praised for her wit and satire, to come home to meet this knight of the sober countenance, and be talked to about adjectives. But criticism from this particular source did not trouble Maggie much. She understood Henry Parsons's real feelings too well, and her own power. A woman must live long enough to experience some of the reactive effects of the misuse of power before she ceases to be a little vain of it. But while the knowledge of this old friend's feeling for her pleased and sometimes moved her, his extreme earnestness, the gravity of his disposition, often wearied her. She liked and depended on him too much willingly to hurt him or to amuse herself with him, as she might have done with a different kind of admirer, like Sidney Gale. Though a little afraid of him, and proud of his attainments, she jealously guarded her own independence in their relations. She could find no safer refuge from this complicated state of feeling than to place her behavior towards him on a footing of sisterly freedom and naturalness. There were other young men in the village who would have counted it a sign of advancement to meet with such frank and friendly treatment as Parsons received, but the latter felt himself continually baffled and defeated by it.

"Never mind the essay," said Maggie, still too happy in recollections of the afternoon seriously to heed the words just spoken. "Come and look at my

flowers," bending over the table. "Aren't they lovely? This is from Mrs. Fay," holding up a basket with the card of the rector's wife attached; "and these roses are from Helen. I never thought of her giving me flowers."

"And who gave you these?" the young man asked, taking up the third bouquet, and holding it awkwardly in his hand.

"It must have been the Great Unknown: there is no card attached."

She tried to speak in an unconcerned tone, but flushed, and was manifestly confused. Her companion noticed it, and a foolish hope sprang up in his breast. Perhaps she attributed the gift to him, and the blush and pretty embarrassment were all his. The temptation was great, but his native honesty forbade him to profit by the sweet delusion.

"I wish it were I who had given them to you," he said, in a regretful tone.

"You?" she replied, looking up at him laughingly. "Oh! I knew it was not you."

This careless speech cut him to the quick, angering as well as paining him.

"Of course you did not think it was I. You never think of me at all except as a stupid dolt, incapable of delicate feeling of any kind."

She looked up at him in surprise.

"How foolishly you talk!" she said. "I hope you are not going to be cross. If I don't mind your not giving me flowers, why should you? Come, now, I will divide with you."

The words "If I don't mind" fell on the listener like cold rain. No other of harshest blame or denial could seem to put a greater distance between them; yet, sore and angry as he was with her, he was even more displeased with himself, and began savagely berating his own dulness that he had not thought to give her some flowers. Maggie cared so much for such things, trifles that, in his usual mood, he condemned as beneath the notice of any self-respecting man. But any attempt at apology could only make the matter worse; and things had been getting worse pretty steadily of late between Maggie and him, he thought, with a stifled groan, so that he dreaded the recurrence of any new mistake with the despairful feeling of a man who sees himself continually losing ground in the pursuit of his dearest object. This hopeless feeling abated a little under the influence of Maggie's behavior. Taking up the flowers from the Great Unknown, she began ruthlessly separating them with nervous fingers, selecting a snowy camellia, with its leaf of glistening green, to ornament her companion's button-hole. She had found a way to punish Sidney Gale.

"See, now, how you are to be punished for having a bad temper," she said, smiling up at him, and ignoring the hurt and pleading look in his eyes. He stood still as a statue as she fastened the flower in its place, taking lengthened pains to secure it properly, and bending her head on one side to note the effect. He loved this pretty, kittenish creature before him with all the intensity of a deep and repressed nature. The

light touch of her fingers, the rustling sweep of her garments against him, the faint odor of the flowers she wore, thrilled him with an ecstatic longing. Did she know it? he wondered. Perhaps, for she forbore to look up again and meet that dark, glowing gaze; only stepped back to take a final, critical look at her work, then, passing her hand through his arm in sisterly fashion, turned towards the mirror and bade him view the result. She carelessly allowed her hand to remain within his arm; and he covered it in grave, protective fashion with his own, as they stood there, looking at each other's shadowed likenesses. The contrast between them was a striking one, and rather becoming to both of them, Maggie thought; but something in the near contact of that bit of bright girlhood at his side, so daring and hopeful, sure to win everywhere the admiration she coveted, made the contrast a painful one to the young man at her side.

"I look like a black bear by the side of you," he said, in a discontented tone.

"That should teach you not to cultivate a bear's manners," she replied. "But even bears can be taught. I have seen some that were very well behaved indeed." She made a little *moue* at him in the glass, and would have withdrawn her hand; but he prevented it, looking earnestly into the imaged face before him. She caught the look, grave and intent, and it held her own a moment.

"How strange it seems to be looking at each other like this!" he murmured. "It is as if we had sud-

denly met each other's spirits, and could look into each other's very souls."

"Now you are getting serious again," she exclaimed, freeing her hand. "I don't like spirits. I leave them to Miss Graham; and I'm very certain I don't want to be one. As for looking into each other's souls, I'm afraid I shouldn't like that any better, though I know people say that is what heaven is like. I don't want everybody looking into my soul"—

"Not everybody, of course," was the reply. "But if there was one we thought more of than—I am willing you should look into mine—you always have."

"Have I?" She spoke lightly, with the air of one whom custom had rendered indifferent to her privileges, and turned again to her flowers. Further relief from a newly threatened attack of seriousness in her companion came with her mother's appearance in the open door.

"Supper's ready," Mrs. Dean said. "I don't know as Maggie will sit down with the rest of us, but I've took off my kitchen apron." Maggie let this bit of pleasantry pass, and seated herself at the table, between her father and their guest, whose presence was evidently a familiar one in the household, and who was treated in an unceremonious manner, as if he were one of themselves.

She was too excited to eat; for, now that the graduating ceremonies were over, she was looking forward, with scarcely less eagerness, to the *alumni* exercises in the evening, to be followed by a recep-

tion at the residence of Mr. Danvers. After the little passage-at-arms between Laura Danvers and herself, Maggie had had a few reluctant scruples about attending the reception; but there had been a partial peace-making between the two that afternoon, while the class was assembled in the recitation room. It would look as badly for her to stay away as to go, and create more talk, Maggie had said to herself, as she canvassed the situation, trying to make the proprieties suit her inclination. Laura Danvers had thought of this, too, feeling herself in as humiliating a position as Maggie. Unwilling to incur the kind of comment which would follow Maggie's absence from the reception, she determined to do what she could to prevent it. Approaching her with a constrained air, she expressed, in a set phrase or two, her regret for the hasty words of the day before, and added a personal invitation for the evening. Maggie listened in wide-eyed astonishment, a vivid flush coloring her cheek. She read the struggle it had cost the other to take this step, but, instead of ignobly triumphing over it, a new feeling of respect and admiration came over her. She made an impetuous reply.

"I was a good deal more rude to you, and I hope you will believe me when I say I have been heartily ashamed of it ever since." Such an answer would have led to an entire reconciliation with any other girl, but Laura Danvers seemed a little repelled by it, turning coldly away. She had not wished to make friends with Maggie Dean, and meant to have as little to do with her as possible. Maggie read these

thoughts, and the hot tears rushed to her eyes, but she would not let them fall. "How much she dislikes me!" she said to herself, "but she need not. If she would treat me fairly, she would see that I could be generous too."

CHAPTER V.

A SUMMER SHOWER.

After supper, Maggie changed her dress, and prepared to accompany Henry Parsons to the schoolhouse. The flounced muslin, which was to do duty again at the reception, was carefully packed in a long box, which Parsons carried under his arm; for it had been agreed that Maggie should go home with Bertha Fay after the *alumni* meeting, to dress for the reception there.

"Then, I suppose, you are going to stay all night with Bertha," her mother said, when she heard of this arrangement.

"I can't," was the reply. "They have company; but I ordered the hack to come for me."

"Well, I declare," said Mrs. Dean, leaning back in her chair; "what next, I wonder!" But, without stopping to tell her, Maggie ran down the steps and out to the gate, where her escort stood waiting for her.

"What is this affair at the Danvers's?" he asked, as they went on their way down the dusty street.

"Why, it's the class reception," Maggie replied: "there's to be dancing and ice-cream."

Her companion smiled. "Well, as I can't dance, and don't care about ice-cream" —

"You don't mean to say you're not going?" Maggie exclaimed, turning swiftly on him.

"Do you want me to go?" he asked, a pleased look glowing in his dark face.

"What has that to do with it? Why shouldn't I want you to go? We want everybody to go," and with this crumb of encouragement he was forced to be content.

Henry Parsons's standing in the *alumni* association was shown in his appointment as the orator of the evening. He had chosen a practical theme, and delivered a thoughtful address in simple and earnest style, that won attention to its real merits, and high praise for himself. Maggie was much pleased, listening attentively and with a rather elated look, as if the speaker's triumph were her own, giving him a shining look of approval at the end, which he felt to be his best reward. Maggie was at just that point in her relations with this old friend when she wanted the privilege of expressing the kindly feelings that arose naturally in her heart without being held to account for them. Though she resisted and kept him at a distance, she was secretly very proud of her old playmate, who had risen from obscure conditions to his present position.

For Parsons himself, this rise was cause for mixed feelings of gratitude and pain. His sensitive pride was continually wounded by the pitying remembrance of his early history which he fancied he read in the friendliest looks and tones. The recollection could never escape him, and, he believed, could never be lost

to others, that he was the unfortunate son of a disgraced and outcast father. Drunken Tim Parsons, as he was still remembered in his native village, had been a notorious character in his day, who, after a life of drink and social vagabondage, had abruptly ended it one cold winter's night by lying down on the roadside during a drunken debauch and freezing to death. This was twelve years after the birth of his son. Henry Parsons had no recollection of his mother, who went out of the world soon after he came in. She had done wisely to die, the son thought. A sense of charitable forgiveness dwelt along with the remembrance of his desolate childhood when he thought of her. He doubted if his life would not have been harder still with the image of a pale, toiling mother in the background, wearing her life out in a thankless slavery to dead and buried ideals, like other women he knew. After his father's death, kind-hearted strangers had interested themselves in him, and procured him the means of an education; but the cloud of social obloquy had hung over him from boyhood, and he knew that he must walk in its shadow to the end. The remembrance of his lonely childhood never forsook him, until, in the revolt which a pure, aspiring nature must feel towards any form of unjust suffering, he had grown almost to hate its memory, and to regard with a feeling of passionate envy those young men among his acquaintance who had come from pure homes and could call some honorable man father.

The cottage where he once lived, a few rods farther down the street where Thomas Dean's house stood,

was nearly in ruins. Except for this proximity, Henry Parsons would have gone miles out of his way to avoid seeing the place again. As it was, a merciful or ironical fate had so arranged it that the most painful associations of his life were inextricably bound up with the sweetest. A just fate too. The true lover of landscape never ignores the ugly spots, knowing what brilliant tints and luxuriant growth are often found near some scene of noisome decay. The student of the moral landscape should follow this example. Henry Parsons lived to learn that he had no more right than power to escape the hard memories of his past; that he could do this only at the cost of some of his most precious recollections, which ran like gold-colored threads across the woof of his sad-colored history. In a word, he could not forget the tumble-down cottage and the picture of the drunken father reeling home at night, without forgetting Maggie.

His first happy recollection was of seizing a big stick to drive away a cow which was frightening her by innocently barring her passage across the bridge on her return from one of the runaway expeditions to her father's shop. He was ten years old then, a ragged, unkempt lad, whose days were spent in idle wandering about the streets; while Maggie was a little girl of six, happy and well cared for. She wore a pink calico frock and a white sunbonnet, whose starched freshness had been marred by sooty fingers. Her face was streaked with dark lines, made in attempts to stay her falling tears. With manly

heroism, he had belabored the surprised cow with his stick and driven her away, then, asking Maggie where she lived, volunteered to go home with her. He was too shy to offer to lead her, but of her own accord she had placed herself close to his side and thrust her hand confidingly in his. The touch of those clinging fingers gave him a new sensation, very sweet and bewildering; and for the first time the long, dull ache of loneliness in his breast was stilled. All his heart went out in an impulse of tender protection to the little creature trotting by his side. He listened to her chatter in dreamful amaze, wondering alike at its silliness and the charm it had for him.

"What made you afraid of the cow?" he asked.

"'Cause I always am," was the reply.

"Why, that's only Mr. Bright's old mooly. She can't hook, she hasn't any horns."

"Couldn't she grow 'em quick, like the kitty does her claws?" asked Maggie, who had never recovered from the surprise of her kitten's first scratch.

The boy laughed aloud at this; and Maggie, catching the infection of his mirth, laughed also, though she did not know why; but well pleased, even at that age, with the knowledge of her power to entertain.

"Shall you always be standing on the bridge with a stick when I run away?" she asked, giving a confiding little skip at his side.

"Did you run away?" he asked, in his turn. She shot a cunning look up at him.

"What did you do that for?"

"I like to. Don't you run away?"

"I don't have to," the boy answered, a little cloud settling over his face.

"Then, don't you have to be punished, either?"

"Do you have to be punished?" he asked, looking wonderingly down at her.

"Of course, most every time, maybe."

"Who punishes you?" he asked, in an indignant tone. "Your father?"

"Oh, no!" looking up at him in grave rebuke. "Fathers don't punish."

"What do they do, then?"

"They toss you up and ride you to Boston."

"Ride you to Boston?" the boy repeated, in a puzzled tone. "Then, it is your mother who punishes you. How does she punish you?" with increasing indignation.

"Shakes me, and sets me down hard."

It seemed incredible to the boy that any one could venture to lay a ruthless hand on this fairy-like being. In order to see the result for himself, and with a dim instinct that his presence might prevent any harm happening to her, wishing he had brought along his stick to interfere in her behalf again, he passed through the gate with Maggie to the door. The runaway was greeted in the usual manner. The predicted shaking was administered, after which she was lifted to a high chair to be tied in.

"Naughty girls must be tied up," said her mother. "Then they can't run away no more."

Maggie submitted to these proceedings without a whimper, and, in fact, felt rather more honored than

grieved over this excessive discipline. She had not expected to be tied up, a form of punishment she felt would confer greater distinction on her in the eyes of her new acquaintance, who stood outside the door, and towards whom she cast a glance of intelligent understanding. The boy looked on with a swelling heart as Mrs. Dean wound the small rope in and out the rounds of the chair, fastening her unruly charge securely in. Maggie's calm indifference looked to him like murdered innocence; and he wanted to rush into the house, seize her, chair and all, and bear her far away. He could endure it no longer, and fled precipitately from the scene; nor was he re-assured by Maggie's voice calling after him in uninjured accents, —

"Good-by, boy; I like you; come again when I ain't bad."

"There's no use trying to punish that child," Mrs. Dean complained to her husband. "It's like pouring water on a duck's back. If I shut her in the bedroom, its ten to one she's in the bureau drawers, and I'll find the clean sheets and pillow-cases strung all over the room. It's a pity you're so set against whipping, Mr. Dean. A little taste of the switch would do her good. You never saw a Weatherby getting along without a good-sized one hanging up handy behind the kitchen door, and the Bible teaches the same thing."

But Mr. Dean, though a very religious man, was not troubled about the Bible. No child of his should ever receive a blow. He gave his wife free range in

matters of household government, except in a few points, where he quietly stated his opinion and stood by it.

After this introduction the acquaintance between Maggie and her new friend progressed rapidly. Mrs. Dean was at first inclined to forbid him the premises, from the displeasure she felt in his forlorn appearance; but she soon grew sorry for him, and began to take a motherly interest in him, getting her reward in the service of a new pair of hands and willing feet, always at her disposal, especially in the care of Maggie, in which respect she came to depend on him a good deal. In summer time the two children wandered together on the banks of the Race, gathering wild-flowers, and watching the shining minnows; while in winter the boy would take his small charge on long, glorious rides down the hill, across the frozen stream. It was he who taught her to skate as they grew older, and to skip a stone as well as a boy. For years they bore each other company to and from school, the boy acting as guide and protector to the little girl, whom he idolized and submitted to continually, except when some question of real right and wrong came up between them, when, if he could not persuade, he would sorrowfully withstand her. Maggie tyrannized over her friend and depended on him at once, alternately praising and neglecting him. As he grew to young manhood, Henry Parsons attracted the attention of Rector Fay and one or two other influential men in the village, who supplied him with the means to continue his studies. After finishing his

course at the high school, he entered a law office, and had lately been admitted to the bar. At the same time he had kept up a course of reading under the superintendence of Mr. Fay.

Thus, at the age of twenty-three, the son of Tim Parsons was prepared to enter active life. Hard work and an unswerving purpose had brought him thus far on his way, unsmirched by any of the vices of growing manhood, with pure instincts, a clear head, and resolute will. Two motives had controlled all his labors. One lay in the resolve to blot out the memory of that shameful death by the winter roadside with an honorable record of his own, and the other was shaped in the wish to win Maggie Dean. But no set motive of conduct affords so true an explanation of individual progress as the instinct of growth planted in every human being. In Henry Parsons this instinct was very strong. He was sure to have won his way to a position of merit and usefulness, even under more difficult circumstances; though, after the morbid reasoning which marks us in the early twenties, he still regarded his lot as one of exceptional hardship. He seemed to himself a spotted man in the community, by the very general good will in which he was held, the expectant attitude of his friends. He should always be at a disadvantage in Litchfield, and had determined to go away. His law studies completed, he meant to go West and make a place for himself among entirely new scenes. He had also a young man's ambition; and a small village like Litchfield would have failed to afford

outlet for this feeling, even had there been no decaying hovel at the lower end of Taylor Street to afflict his vision like an ugly sore. In further preparation for his new duties he had spent the last two months in the country, taking a few lessons in practical farming; for he meant to take up a land claim, more quickly to secure the fortune his profession would but slowly gain. He had come into town to see Maggie graduate and to attend the *alumni* meeting. The evening's exercises closed, he remained behind a few moments, leaving Maggie to go with her friend. She, too, had had a place on the evening's programme, giving a humorous recitation. She had some talent in that line, and the applause she received repeated in a degree the success of the afternoon; so it was with a new feeling of triumph and happy anticipation that she made ready for the festivities that were to close the day.

The large parlors in Mr. Danvers's house had been thrown together to serve as a ball-room. Dancing was a favorite exercise with Maggie, who had always plenty of partners. The engagement card which hung at her wrist was soon filled, and two or three tardy cavaliers turned disconsolately away. She was conscious of admiring eyes following her as she floated past in the waltz, with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes. She had forgotten everything but the exciting sport in which she was engaged, when her eyes fell on Henry Parsons, who had come in late and stood talking with Bertha Fay, though he kept directing a gloomy, half-displeased look in her direc-

tion. She felt this look still fixed on her when her partner left her at her friend's side, but she would not raise her eyes to meet it.

"What a pity you can't dance, Bertha!" she said, consulting her card as to the coming partner. As the minister's daughter, Bertha was debarred from joining in many of the young people's amusements.

"Oh, I don't mind!" was the cheerful reply. "I enjoy looking on, but I have been telling Mr. Parsons he ought to learn."

"And what does Mr. Parsons say?" Something in that tall, stiff figure seemed to have an obstructing force of its own, which irritated Maggie.

"I didn't find him very easy to persuade," Bertha replied, sending a smiling glance upward to the object of these remarks.

"He is not generally easy to persuade, I fancy," Maggie said, intent on the arrangement of the ribbon on her wrist.

The young man kept quite still. He was both hurt and angry. Maggie had never called him "Mr." before, speaking in a cool society tone that put him at an immeasurable distance. Perhaps it would have been improper to call him anything else there, or to behave differently from what she was doing; perhaps these were the manners society required; he knew nothing of society or its ways except that he hated both. He could not understand why Maggie liked such things, and the sight of her whirling about the room with a young man had given him something like a moral shock. Finding it impossible to resist

his gaze longer, Maggie raised her eyes to his. "You think dancing is a very frivolous pursuit, I suppose?" He gave a short, satirical laugh.

"Pursuit!" he exclaimed. "I didn't know dancing had been dignified with that name. However," with a withering look towards the floor, "there are plenty of people who seem to have no better." It was now Maggie's turn to be angry, and she would have made a sharp retort had not Bertha interposed in a conciliating tone.

"Papa says there is no harm in dancing if it is not carried to excess," she said. "It is other things that go along with dancing that make it harmful. He would be willing I should learn dancing if it were not for what people would say," she added innocently.

"Your father is a sensible man, Miss Bertha," Parsons replied, "and I am sure there could be no harm in your learning to dance."

Maggie shrugged her shoulders. "You ought to feel quite flattered, Bertha," she cried. "It is not often that Mr. Parsons condescends to pay a compliment."

"I don't like compliments," Bertha replied gravely; and Parsons, feeling that he had offended in a new direction, turned away.

"What a naughty girl you are, Maggie!" she continued, when they were alone.

"What have I done now?"

"Treating old friends like that!"

"Then, why is he so disagreeable — always trying to put me down? What is the use of being so stiff

and sober, like a monument smiling at grief, only he never smiles?" smiling herself back into good-nature over the twisted quotation and its general inapplicability. "Where is Frank Wilson, I wonder? I am engaged to him for this galop."

"Let me see your card," Bertha said, taking the printed slip in her hand. "That's all right," she added, handing it back a moment after.

"What's all right?" Maggie asked, with a conscious look.

"You know."

"Then, I suppose I can go on dancing with a good conscience?"

"Is a good conscience necessary in a thing of that kind?"

"It helps," said Maggie, and the next moment was led to the floor by young Wilson.

She knew that Bertha was pleased at the discovery that Sidney Gale's name was not on her list, but she said to herself that it would look better if she were to dance with him once. If she felt any disappointment, it was allayed by the fact that so far he had not danced at all. Early in the evening he had placed himself beside Mrs. Danvers and her daughter, to assist in receiving the guests, like a pattern young relative. It was late when he led Laura Danvers to the floor for the Lancers. That duty performed, he began an eager search about the rooms for some one else. Maggie saw him, though she received him with a look that seemed to denote that she only at that moment recalled his existence. He asked to see her

card, glanced through it, and gave vent to an impatient exclamation.

"This is too bad!" he said, in a tone of real grievance. "You might have saved one for me, I think."

"How very modest!" Maggie said, fanning herself with slow unconcern.

"Modesty isn't my *forte*," he replied, still studying the bit of pasteboard. "See here," he went on, "here's Tommy Holt down for two waltzes. That isn't fair, Tommy," bending a severe look on a boyish young fellow standing near. Tommy Holt was one of Maggie's younger admirers, lately promoted to the dignity of frock-coats. Her promise to give him two waltzes had nearly turned his head, but he was a manly boy withal. He blushed, and was a little displeased at Gale's manner, but straightened his small figure, and, with a polite bow, said it was just as Miss Dean wished, of course; if she desired the exchange—

For the space of a second Maggie wavered, then bethought herself. "Miss Dean desires nothing of the kind, Tommy. First come, first served," lifting her eyes to exchange a long look with Sidney Gale, who stood regarding her with a half smiling, half frowning expression, and the same flash of bold admiration in his eyes she had met before. Bending nearer, he dropped a spiteful whisper in her ear. "Thank you for giving my flowers to another man," darting a scowling glance in the direction of Henry Parsons, who stood near the door, and who still wore Maggie's camellia.

"Were they your flowers?" she asked indiffer-

ently. "You ought to feel complimented. Mr. Parsons is the hero of the evening. He deserves all our honors."

"The conquering hero?" Gale asked, with a meaning look. "He doesn't look like it. Looks about as cheerful as a pall-bearer at a circus."

"No wonder," Maggie retorted, "when the performance is so silly." Gale looked some natural surprise at this.

"That is a refreshing remark for you to make," he said. "So you think dancing is silly?"

"It would be for a man like Henry Parsons."

The musicians struck up a waltz, and Maggie placed her hand on Tommy Holt's shoulder. She had meant to plant a little sting in her listener, and it rankled, at the same time that her open opposition piqued his admiration anew. "She carries it off confoundedly well," he said to himself, "but what a jealous rage Parsons is in," with another glance towards the door. "Jealous of Tommy Holt!"

Maggie meant what she said when she told her friend that she could dance better with a good conscience. In spite of her enjoyment in an occasion like the present, a slight circumstance often served to check it. There was no amusement she liked better than dancing; but, to be perfect, many conditions were required besides a canvas-covered carpet and good music. One must have a good partner, and by that Maggie meant something more than one who could take the gliding step, — one who added the gift of bright and sensible talk to Mercury's heels, and

whose hair was not brushed with that exact nicety which excludes suspicion of a brain beneath. In a word, what Maggie missed in her social diversions, yet hardly knew she missed, was a certain spiritual grace and charm. If she had expressed her own feeling, she would have said that she only wanted things to be what they seemed. They never were exactly. These thoughts did not greatly trouble her this evening, only remained like a faint hint of regret in the depths of a bosom stirred with young and pleasant emotions.

As the hour grew late, Henry Parsons approached her again to say that Mr. Fay, who had left early, had requested him to see Bertha safely home; that he was going with her then, and would return to accompany Maggie.

"That will not be necessary," she replied, with some coldness, and explained that she had ordered a carriage. His shadow had seemed to follow her all the evening like an accusing conscience, though what she had done to hurt anybody's conscience she did not know. It was impossible not to resent the discomfort she felt in his presence.

"Does that mean that you do not wish me to return?" he asked.

"It means whatever you choose to make it."

"Very well, I choose to make it mean what you seem to desire," and he turned and left her.

Maggie was a little ashamed, but she defended herself by saying that her behavior was only the reflex of his, which was worse.

It was after midnight, and the other guests had departed, when she descended the stairs from the dressing-room. She was a little embarrassed by her lonely position, and hoped to escape from the house without observation. Hearing a footstep, Mrs. Danvers came into the hall, followed by her daughter. The latter, when she saw Maggie, drew back, bowed coldly, and returned to the parlor; but Mrs. Danvers stepped towards her with a look of motherly concern. "My dear child, are you alone?"

"Oh! that is nothing," Maggie replied lightly. "The hack is waiting for me."

"Still, I don't like you to go by yourself: I will call Sidney"—

"No, no!" Maggie exclaimed, alarmed in a new direction; and, bidding her hostess good-night, she passed quickly through the door, which a servant opened for her, and found herself alone outside. To her dismay, she saw no carriage in front, though she strained her eyes in the darkness, and, to complete her distress, a light summer shower had set in. She had only thin slippers on her feet, and a light wrap over her shoulders. What should she do? Prudence and reason alike counselled her to re-enter the house, but she said to herself that she would die sooner than do that. Fearing discovery, she ran down the steps and took refuge under a large tree. She was now thoroughly frightened. It was plain that her orders about the hack had been misunderstood or disobeyed. She must go back into the house and seek the protection of her enemy, or walk home in the rain and at mid-

night, through the loneliest and most dangerous part of the town. Dreadful as this last alternative seemed, she determined to take it. It was raining faster, and she must start at once. Gathering her skirts round her, she was about to run towards the gate, when the door of the house opened, and Sidney Gale came out. Maggie drew hurriedly behind the tree and waited. He carried an umbrella, and paused a moment on the steps to strike a match and light his cigar, its pale flash lighting his features distinctly a moment, then fading out. Raising his umbrella, he ran down the steps and walked rapidly towards the gate. Once he slipped and came near falling, but recovered himself, with a muttered exclamation, passing through the gate and out of sight. The sound of his footsteps had no sooner died away than Maggie heard others coming in an opposite direction; and, in despair, she prepared to wait until these, too, had passed. Looking out, she saw a young man's figure cross the lighted space under the street-lamp.

"Henry — Henry Parsons! — O Henry!" she cried, springing out from her retreat. He turned and peered eagerly through the darkness, then, catching sight of a glimmering white object, he flung open the gate and came towards her.

"Maggie!" he exclaimed, in sharp surprise. "For Heaven's sake, what has happened?" She had broken down into a fit of hysterical laughing and crying, clinging to his arm and imploring him to take her home. He listened to her broken recital of what had taken place, in a storm of conflicting feelings, rage at

the delinquent hackman, and alarm for Maggie being mingled with a sudden keen joy in the thought that it was he who had come to her rescue. It was his name she had called in that tone of frightened distress; his arm to which she was clinging, to him she was appealing for protection. The next moment his anxiety for her overcame every other thought, and he said, peremptorily, that she must return to the house while he went in search of a carriage.

"Never!" she exclaimed, checking her tears, and speaking with martyr-like resolve. "I will never enter that house again!" He could not in the least comprehend this, and tried to remonstrate with her; but she would not listen, only repeated, obstinately, what she had said before.

"Then, what will you do?" he asked despairfully.

"Oh, take me home!" she sobbed, dropping from this state of iron resolve. "Take me home. I don't mind the walk. My slippers are wet through already."

"Slippers!" exclaimed the young man, aghast. He glanced down at her feet, then cast a look of swift inspection over her. Maggie did, indeed, present a sorry sight. Her long skirts clung limply about her, and lay in a wet mass at her feet. Her pretty crimps hung in little damp patches on her forehead, and her face was wet with tears and the falling rain. If it had been Sidney Gale standing before her, all his concern and desire to relieve her could not have overcome his love of the ludicrous; but Henry Parsons had a small sense of humor at any time.

"How can I take you home?" he asked. "Do you suppose I will let you walk? It is perfect folly. You must go back into the house," he added, in sudden resolution, placing his arm about her in order to execute his will by force, if necessary.

"Oh, I can't, I can't!" she moaned, feeling herself growing helpless to resist him, at the same time that her own resolve never weakened. "What's that?" grasping his arm and raising her head to listen. His ear also had caught the sound of rumbling wheels. The next moment he had leaped the fence, and putting his finger to his lips, boy fashion, rent the night's stillness with a shrill whistle, then, standing under the street-lamp, waved his hat excitedly. There was a pause, followed by a sound of turning wheels, and almost immediately a hack drew up before the gate. Parsons, to relieve his feelings, began to berate the driver for his recent betrayal of trust, while he hurriedly assisted Maggie to a place inside.

"Don't scold him," she whispered, "that isn't the man." At the same time the driver made a surly grumble to the effect that he didn't know nothing about no young woman's orders, and reminded his offended patron, with a touch of professional pride, that there were two hacks in that town, ending by throwing out a general remark that folks would do well to hold their jaw until they found the man that had earned it.

"Very well, then," Parsons replied. "If you are not the man, so much the better. Now drive on as fast as you can."

Maggie was completely chilled, and shivered from head to foot. Her companion wrapped a heavy robe about her in a clumsy fashion that would have made her laugh at any other time. Now she was only humbled and afraid. Once or twice his hand touched hers. There was no impulse on her part to avoid the contact, but his seemed to dread and shrink away from it with a feeling that looked like repugnance. He was offended with her, Maggie thought, and was growing to despise her as well. The good opinion of others was Maggie's spiritual breathing stuff. Leaning towards him, she spoke with a hesitation she had never before felt in his presence. "I — I am sorry I was cross with you."

"O Maggie, Maggie!" he cried, seizing her hand, clasping it with a force that was painful, then dropping, almost flinging it from him. He could not trust himself to speak further, while she shrunk silent and ashamed into the corner of the carriage. In this her hour of distress, she had turned as naturally to him for help as in the old days when she brought all her childish griefs and troubles to him. Would it always be so? he asked himself bitterly. Would she never seek him except when she was in trouble and deserted by the gay friends on whom she lavished all her smiles and tenderness? But, though thoughts like these burned in his heart, it was hard to resist the influence of her present mood as she sat there, subdued and still, beside him in the dark carriage. The temptation was strong to take advantage of this sudden gentleness, to pour out his heart and

claim the reward that would never again perhaps be within such easy reach. Had she not admitted her need of him in that imploring cry she had sent to him through the darkness? But a delicate sense of honor would have forbidden indulgence in this line of thought, even had his heart been satisfied with the result. To take advantage of Maggie's present condition would be the act of a thief, though he stood a better chance to win what he wanted than he ever should again, he sadly reflected.

They rode on silently until they reached her home. Resisting her protests, he lifted her from the carriage and carried her up the wet walk to the door. He bade her good-night, then ran swiftly down the walk to the street. Maggie entered the house and stole upstairs like a guilty creature, going softly past her own room, where Helen was asleep, and seeking the solitude of the spare chamber. Hurriedly undressing, she crept into bed and cried herself to sleep. On the floor lay a mass of soiled and crumpled muslin, symbol of the dejected ruin in which the hopes of graduation day had ended.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RE-ACTION.

MAGGIE rose late the next morning, in a subdued frame of mind, that lasted several days. The closing scenes of the day before had left an ineffaceable impression that banished remembrance of all the pleasant things preceding. Though graduation day was not twenty-four hours removed, its illusions were destroyed, and already it had become a source of mortified reflection and disappointment. All day Maggie went about the house in a listless and dejected mood, unable to fix attention on any of her household tasks, making innumerable blunders, and exposing herself to a continual stream of ironic comment from her mother.

"What ails you?" that sprightly woman asked, as Maggie stood leaning disconsolately against the window, viewing the landscape outside. "A body'd think you'd lost your last friend."

"Perhaps I have," was the unencouraging reply; and, in fact, her mother's words seemed to describe very well the utter abandonment of self-love in which she found herself. Maggie had been on such excellent terms with herself of late that the contrast with her present discontent brought a feeling of friendless isolation, as bewildering as it was painful.

"Well, you can't expect every day to be like yesterday,—folks bowin' an' scrapin' an' presentin' you with a diplomy."

Maggie colored and answered, with a touch of her old spirit, that she expected nothing of the kind, adding that she hoped she wasn't a simpleton.

"Well, I didn't know."

"I'm only tired. I believe I'll change my dress and go up to Bertha's;" but, before she reached the stair door, she changed her mind instead, and remained at home.

It is well we have bodies to help bear the spirit's shortcomings. A headache serves as the convenient disguise for many a heartache, and the loss of a night's sleep accounts very well for the pallor and flagging strength which find remoter cause in a disturbed conscience. Unhappiness has an exhausting effect on the vital energies, and Maggie, burdened with many troublesome thoughts, could honestly say she was tired. Moreover, the excitement of a day like that before inevitably brings its re-action, cheating expectation of what is to come after. To Maggie, life was symbolized by constant movement; and, now that there was no call for immediate action or interest in something new, things seemed to have settled into a state of abnormal dulness and quiet, making the future landscape look very flat. School ended, she knew not how she should fill up the long, empty days to come. Maggie was certain she could never lead such a life as her sister Helen's, with its uneventful routine, rising at the same hour every morn-

ing, and walking to and from the store three times a day. She had noticed that Helen always went the same way.

This mood of listless indecision lasted until the following Sunday; and at the last moment, though she was dressed and ready to accompany her father and mother to church, she suddenly announced her determination not to go, letting them depart without her. Neither tried to persuade her, Mrs. Dean merely remarking that she thought when folks graduated it was for evidence they had shown of having some kind of mind and knowing what to do with it, but Maggie seemed to have lost hers altogether.

"Oh, well," her husband said, in his mild tones, "let her stay at home if she wants to; she's kinder tuckered out, I 'xpect, what with the 'xcitement and all."

So Maggie took a book, and passing through a small orchard at the side of the house, and intervening pasture, went down to the Race, to a favorite spot she called her own. The book was Owen Meredith's "Lucile." Its easy, mechanical rhythm and romantic word-painting naturally pleased the fancy of a girl of eighteen. She opened it near the closing pages, though she liked this part less than the beginning of the poem, because it was so painful. Maggie frankly admitted her preference for those stories, whether in prose or verse, that ended happily; but she had sufficient literary judgment to know that the best books were apt to end very differently, and she had a certain pride here as elsewhere, which made her scorn

the cheap delights of the lower order of fiction. Tears filled her eyes and a nameless pain rose in her breast as she re-read those pages of the little volume, where Lucile, crowned with the spirit of self-sacrifice, meets her rejected lover for the last time, and, throwing her whole soul into the struggle between his baser and nobler nature, helps the latter to win, before she disappears in the gray twilight settling over the French camp.

"Was life always like that?" Maggie asked herself with a sigh. Not one of the characters in the poem was left wholly happy at the end; as happy, that is, as if he had never made any mistakes. But how noble Lucile was! That was better than being happy, Maggie supposed, with another sigh. At least, that was what the poem meant to teach. That was what books generally taught, she reflected, with some discontent. If she were to write a book, now, it would be to show how people could be good and happy too. But to have to do as Lucile did, give up that bright, luxurious life, all praise and flowers and sunshine, to put on a nun's garb and take care of sick soldiers,—Maggie could think of nothing more unpleasant than that.

She then passed the real people whom she knew in mental review before her, to learn what mixture of goodness and happiness their lives contained. First, her father: he was good, but was he happy? Maggie believed not, though it seemed a strange conclusion to reach respecting a quiet, easy-going man like her father, who never uttered a word of complaint. But

Maggie believed her father had many thoughts and feelings he never expressed. She knew he felt his disadvantages keenly. He was a man imprisoned by circumstances he had no power to change. No, she would always count her father among the best of men, but she did not believe he was one of the happiest. Her mother, then? She smiled a little and dismissed this part of her subject. There was no need to trouble herself about her mother, who never had any feeling of doubt or discontent about herself. And Helen? Well, if Helen were happy, it was in a queer way, which Maggie did not envy. It was easy to guess what Helen's own answer would be, — that being happy mattered little providing you did the thing you ought. Next the image of her friend Bertha passed before her. Yes, here she could give a satisfactory answer. There was no doubt that Bertha was good and happy too. The two things seemed to run together in a nature like hers, all cheerfulness and content. The rector's daughter had that well-regulated disposition which finds all wrong-doing more difficult than enticing. She had neither Maggie's adventurous spirit nor mental quickness.

The image of Sidney Gale flitted before Maggie. If thinking well of one's self could make one happy, then undoubtedly he was happy; but she doubted if he had much deeper cause. This mental procession ended in the remembrance of Henry Parsons. He was like Helen, and would think any happiness of little account that was not earned by some kind of

difficult effort. Her thoughts then wandered a little, and she began to speculate on the probability of Parsons having gone back to the farm the day before. He would have been more likely to stay and spend Sunday with them had it not been for the troublesome events of Friday evening. As it was, Maggie doubted his coming; doubted, too, his power to remain away. Her reflections were cut short at this point by a rustling footstep, and, looking up, she saw the object of them coming down the bank. He paused a moment, and his eyes met hers as if in doubt of his welcome. A faint blush colored her cheek, not so much at the sight of her visitor, as in remembrance of their last meeting.

"I met your father and mother," he explained, as he threw himself on the ground at her side, "and they said you were not going to church, so I concluded I wouldn't either. I thought—I wanted—why, you've been crying!" He sat upright as he said these last words and looked at her.

"I haven't either," Maggie replied, brushing her hand across her eyes; "at least, it's only a book I've been reading."

He took the book from her and began turning the leaves with gingerly fingers. He read but little poetry, save of the severer order, like "Paradise Lost" and "The Excursion," necessary to a young man's knowledge of English. This little volume, with its dainty binding of blue and gold, would have aroused his mistrust, even had it not had the power to excite Maggie's tears. Life had brought him knowledge of

so many real ills that he had small sympathy to bestow on the factitious ones of made-up people. He handed the book back to her and asked her what it was about.

"Oh! it's about a man and woman who loved each other and were to be married, only they quarrelled and separated, so he fell in love with another woman, not so deeply in love as with the first, you know, but they were engaged just the same. Then, just before they were married, he received a message from the first saying he must bring back all her letters, and he does so, and then they fall in love with each other again." Here the listener's lips took on a perceptible curve.

"There seems to have been a good deal of 'falling in love,' and the expression fits the case, I should say —'*falling* in love' indeed."

"Oh, you are always so critical! Of course, they had never stopped loving each other, only they didn't know it. Then he says he will break off his engagement and she consents"—

"Who consents, the second one?".

"No, no, the first; but afterwards she repents and sends him back to marry the other one. Then she goes on sacrificing and sacrificing herself until she gets to be a sister of charity in the hospital, and has to wear coarse gray serge." This climax was too much for Parsons's gravity, and he laughed outright.

"You may laugh if you like," smiling a little herself, "but I say it was very noble of her."

"Oh, it was sublime!" Then, more seriously, "I

don't think much of a man who doesn't know his own mind better than that."

"Why, would you have had him break his word?" she demanded reproachfully.

"A bad promise is better broken than kept," was the sententious reply.

"You may think so, perhaps, but the people who live in books never act like that. There would be no plot nor anything. The story would end with the first chapter."

"That would be a good thing. Of course, she only wanted to test her power over him when she sent for her letters."

"Oh, what a shame!" Maggie murmured.

"Pooh! it's easy enough to see through a thing like that."

"Do you mean that he saw through it? Then he would have despised her and staid away."

"Oh! would he?" the young man answered, with an ironical laugh. "Your hero was a fine fellow, no doubt, but it's evident he hadn't altogether lost Mother Eve's taste for stolen fruit."

"Oh, do let poor Eve alone!" said Maggie, with the natural grievance the sex has come to feel in allusions of this kind. "Why, you're getting to be a perfect cynic," speaking in that tone of mingled rebuke and flattery which young women use in addressing remarks of this nature to their gentlemen acquaintances. "Don't you believe there is any true feeling in the world?"

"Yes, I do," he made quick reply, turning glowing

eyes upon her. "There is plenty of it all round us. We have only to reach out our hands to find pure, self-sacrificing love waiting to serve and bless us. We need not go to books to find out what that is. But most people are such ingrates and fools, turning their backs deliberately on the good given them, to whine and cry after the moon."

Maggie flushed and looked uneasy. The conversation was drawing near the line marked "dangerous." Indeed, she had not been without an exciting sense of danger from the beginning, which both tempted and warned her back from pursuit of the chosen subject. An acute observer of the times has said that to talk about love is to make love, an opinion which Maggie would have stoutly denied, even while a frightened instinct proved its truth.

"I always thought the moon a rather useful invention," she said, speaking lightly and taking a little mental skip to a safer standing-place in the discussion, "especially on a dark night."

"I never saw the moon on a dark night," was the reply. "It's well enough in its place, no doubt; but you'd have to try a long time before you could light the kitchen fire with it. There are plenty of things to cry about in the world, without getting some sickly poet to poison us with his diseased fancies."

"Oh, well! it wasn't the book only that made me cry," Maggie said, with a touch of self-defence. "I'm all out of sorts anyway," leaning back against the trunk of the tree under which they were seated. She was in the mood to talk out her feelings, and

again grew careless of consequences. "I suppose it's the re-action," with a faint smile. "Things seem so different now that school is over. It's just as if everything had suddenly stopped. Did you feel that way?" she ended, turning to her companion.

"Why, no," he replied slowly, "I think I felt as if things had just begun. I was glad school was over that I might get to my law-books."

"Yes, of course; it's so different with a man," in weary acceptance of the smaller fate allotted to her. "There's always something ready and waiting for him."

A dark flush rose to the young man's face, and he was hesitating for a reply, when she spoke again.

"Of course I could go on studying, but what is the use when you don't know that you'll ever do anything with it? There's Bertha, now. She's going to study Italian with her father, and read Dante in the original; but of course I couldn't do that, even if"— "even if I had a father instructed in modern languages," she might have been going to say, but instead of that she broke into a little helpless laugh at her own expense, — "even if I wanted to."

"Then, if you don't want to read Dante in the original, why worry about it?"

"Because it's not wanting to do things, at least not knowing whether you want to do them or not, and yet thinking perhaps you ought to want to do them, that makes it so hard to decide."

This was a way of stating the case that her listener did not try to follow, covering his face with his hand

in gloomy silence. Here was Maggie bemoaning a future that looked all blank and purposeless to her to the man who had offered her his love and stood ready to make that future clear; yet apparently he filled no larger space in her present thoughts than the small black insect crawling across her shoe. A dumb hopelessness settled over him, and a feeling of stupefied surprise at her cruelty or insensibility, he did not know which.

"I suppose I might learn shorthand," she began again. He sprang to his feet and walked down to the water's edge. One who knew the mental conflict passing within might have thought it was for the purpose of throwing himself in, had the stream been more than twenty inches deep. Maggie, without apparent notice of this behavior, rose and slowly followed him. They stood together a few moments, looking into the running water and listening to the faint plash of the waves.

"There is a nest of minnows," she said, pointing to a sun-flecked spot where the darting forms of the little scaled creatures glanced in the light. As she spoke, both her memory and his went back to the time when they used to visit this same spot together. With tin cup and pail they would wade out to the middle of the stream to catch the minnows, and take them home to inhabit a miniature pond in the rain-barrel. His eyes followed the direction of her finger, but he did not speak.

"It is not so pleasant here as it used to be," she went on. "The bank is not so green, and the water

is shallower. Or is it because we have grown up?"

"I think it is because we have grown up."

"How mournfully you say that, as if you were sorry. I'm not sorry. I think I like being grown up. But I feel as young as ever," she added rather inconsistently, testing this remark by picking up a stone to throw into the water and hear the splash. "Don't you?" turning a bright, careless face up to his.

"Just about," was the grim reply. "I don't think, in that respect, the pyramids have the advantage of a day over me."

Maggie greeted this remark with a ripple of laughter that to her listener joined in its discordant effect on his feelings with the sparkling sunshine and the rustling leaves.

"Have you forgotten that I am going away next week?" he asked her suddenly, his tortured soul gazing entreatingly at her through his eyes. She turned her own away.

"So soon?" she asked, in as careless a tone as she could command.

"Are you going to send me off to Dakota without a word, Maggie?" he asked, in a low tone.

"I am not going to send you to Dakota at all."

"Don't play with me," he said sharply. "How much longer must I wait for an answer?" There was a moment's ominous silence after this imperative speech. Maggie's cheek flushed, and she raised her head proudly. When she spoke, it was with a kind of deadly quiet.

"You need not wait any longer."

He shot a quick apprehensive look at her and turned pale. But she did not wish to be too severe, and when she spoke again it was with the old playful ease.

"Have you heard the story of the man who asked a woman to marry him, and when she asked time to consider said that it must be now or never? Do you know what her answer was?"

"I can guess," was the reply, turning a stricken face to one side.

"Oh! I do not want to hurt you," she cried, with sudden remorse. "Why can't we leave things as they are? No girl ought to promise a thing of that kind when she feels as I do."

"Why not say outright, then, that you hate me?"

"Because I do not hate you," in a sweetly judicial tone. "On the contrary, I like you — like you better than any one I know — almost," withdrawing herself a little farther from him as he turned eagerly towards her. "But, if I were to say what you wish, I should hate you," she went on in pitiless candor. "It's very unkind and tyrannical in you to try to make me say it; and it is of no use," speaking in a firmer tone. "I have said I would not talk on this subject. I will not be bound. I belong to myself." She threw out her arms with a quick upward motion, as if invoking the free air about her and the boundless stretch of blue sky above.

"All this means but one thing," he said, standing beside her in marble stillness. "You do not love me." She made no reply to this.

"My God!" he broke out, with a passionate sob in his voice. "Why, then, must I care for you? Why must love be spilled like water on the ground, when there are people who go mad with thirst for it? All my life I have loved you. You know what that life has been — not a ray of brightness in it until I found you. But you, you care no more for me than for the dry stick that brushes against your dress. I say there's something terribly wrong in the universe when things turn out like that, when there's nothing for a man to do but tear his heart out of him and trample it in the dust."

Maggie was both shaken and frightened at this outburst, and the sight of the suffering she was causing moved her conscience as well as pity. For a moment she seemed very small and blameworthy in her own eyes, for the absence of a feeling like this she had power to evoke: and the impulse to substitute that sentiment of kindly interest and admiration she did possess was very strong. Precisely here is the critical turning-point in many a young woman's experience, where sympathy, combined with an aroused conscience, assumes love's guise, and yields the gift of a higher feeling. The question why honest love cannot win return in kind is one that has puzzled older heads than Maggie's, and it was to her credit that for the passing moment her main feeling should be that of reproach and self-deficiency. Tears filled her eyes, and she felt herself at once the most abused and wickedest girl in the world.

"Oh, I am sorry!" she said, lifting a contrite face

to her lover, and speaking in a trembling voice. "I am sorry, and I — I have done wrong. If only you would not take things so — so hard. You ought to see I have tried to act for the good of us both," her old peremptory spirit coming back again. "Suppose I should say yes, and then be sorry. 'A bad promise is better broken than kept,' you said."

"No, no, I will wait," he said hurriedly, waving his hand to dismiss this side of the case.

"I don't know," she went on plaintively, "perhaps I am selfish. If I am not willing to be bound, neither should you be."

"What is the use of talking about that?" he exclaimed. "I am bound whether I choose or not. I love you. I shall go on loving you until I die. I might as well try to swing myself off the earth as to get rid of that feeling."

She could find no reply to this, perhaps did not try very hard; and they stood silent a moment.

"I think I had better go into the house now," she said at length. They climbed the bank, he assisting her with his strong hand, and they walked towards the house.

"Aren't you going to stay to dinner?" she asked, with a timid glance at him, as he stood doubtfully at the porch-steps. He hesitated, and murmured some feeble excuse.

"It's all right if you don't wish to, of course," she said, with a little hint of injury, "but father will be disappointed."

Upon this he went up the steps, and seated himself

in a large rocker on the porch, while Maggie entered the house to help about the dinner. He felt very wretched, but the hope that had formed the main motive of his life still kept its hold on him. The words "Father will be disappointed" carried an assurance of coming success that their speaker had carelessly overlooked. It was impossible that Henry Parsons should not feel his cause strengthened by the knowledge of the secure position he held in the esteem of all of Maggie's family. He knew that her parents looked on him as her accepted lover, and that knowledge could but give rise to the feeling that, in some wilful way of her own, Maggie looked on him in the same light.

CHAPTER VII.

AN EVENING DRIVE.

It is not belittling the troubles of a girl of eighteen to compare them, though rather tritely, to the summer clouds which temper the summer warmth and brightness; since those skilled in such matters know that the smallest mass of diaphanous vapor suspended in the skies has its effect on the general climate. Maggie recovered her usual spirits in a day or two, but she never outgrew the memory of that particular Sunday, which stood in a gray outline by itself, years afterwards when she was better able to understand it. Along with her lively social instincts and natural light-heartedness ran a more serious vein, which, if there had been some judicious friend to develop it, might have become a leading motive in her character. As it was, there was no one standing near her who could help her much except her sister, whose love was too solicitous, and whose example embodied too many restraints, with a morbid devotion to the difficult side of life, to be of great value to an enthusiastic nature like Maggie's. It was principally through her association with the minister's family that she had derived those ideas of superior culture and refinement which, thus far, had done little else

than unsettle her and arouse a host of conflicting hopes and ambitions.

Now that her school-days were ended, the feeling of high expectation which had held her for the last few weeks was mingled with a sense of wasted effort. What did it all amount to anyway, the diploma she had won, and the knowledge of Fasquelle, if she could not apply these elements of strength to some new enterprise commanding all her energies? Maggie stood just at that point where we are enamoured of existence for itself. Simply to be alive was a boon, and every disagreeable thought and remembrance which cast a shadow over the smiling outlook before her was brushed impatiently aside. It was impossible to resist the belief that the future held something very good for her, some measure of strange, unexpected bliss, some unknown experience or emotion that should set her quite apart from and above her present self, and make a new, exalted creature of her. Some people would have but one interpretation to put on such a state of mind in a young girl; but their method of analyzing and providing for the growing souls about them is as shallow as it is vulgar. It was not a lover Maggie wanted. She only wanted to live. That fate was kindly disposed towards her seemed manifest in the strong, buoyant faith that upheld her and fluttered like wings of promise in her heart. She went about the house in a dreamful maze, a smile and sometimes a song on her lips. She had an odd trick of suddenly pausing in the door to look down the street with intent, abstracted gaze.

"Are you expectin' comp'ny?" her mother asked, during one of these meditative pauses. Maggie, flushing, turned away and said, "No."

"I don't know what has come over me," she added. "I feel just as if something was going to happen."

"There is," her mother responded dryly. "That white jacket in the clothes-basket is going to mildew pretty soon if you don't iron it;" but Maggie was too secure in her present mood to allow a little sarcasm of this kind to disturb it. She laughed, and, relinquishing her higher expectations for a time, went into the kitchen to finish her share of the week's ironing. An aspiring wish in the heart gives relish to the meanest task, and Maggie ironed the white jacket unusually well. She did not dislike work of this kind, having inherited from her mother that sense of efficiency and love of useful occupation which delights in accomplished results of any kind. What Maggie really disliked was the necessity, growing out of laws and conditions she had no hand in making, that she should always do such work and be contented in the doing. Lucile had never ironed a white jacket. Neither had Laura Danvers. Why, then, was she, Maggie Dean, obliged to do so, and why should such a circumstance make any difference in the feeling of people towards her? Why should people look down on her, and she feel herself at a disadvantage at every turn, because her father was a workingman, and her mother did her own housework and sometimes tripped in her grammar? These were the questions that perplexed and irritated Maggie,

sowing the seeds of a rebellious discontent in her heart.

She was still very young when she began to notice the difference between her own home and that of her associates, for it had been Maggie's fortune since childhood to find her most intimate companions in a class considerably removed from that into which she was born. Our public schools afford the only true republic, and the average boy or girl in attendance thereon is a born democrat. Maggie, with her good looks and merry disposition, was always a favorite, while a resolute judgment gave her a position of leadership among her mates. Privileges of this kind were partially offset by the jealous suspicion in which she was held by girls in her own social rank, like Mollie Harmon for example. But Maggie resented too much the implication that girls like Mollie Harmon were her natural companions, to feel proud of the distinction of being raised above them. What she wanted was to obliterate all distinctions of that sort, to stand on her own merits and be allowed her fair chance in the world, irrespective of the fact that she was a girl and the daughter of the foreman of the locomotive works.

Externally, Maggie had led a narrow and most uneventful life, with no chance for that variety and widening knowledge which youth craves. She felt cramped and imprisoned in her present surroundings, her imagination finding little to feed on in the dull routine of her life at home. Her mother's housekeeping was of the kind that makes substantial pro-

vision for all material necessities, without a touch of refining grace or sentiment to lift it out of the commonplace. Her narrow, set ways irritated Maggie, whose fancy continually took flight to other homes, like Bertha's, where something of fresh interest was always going on.

Sweeping-day had followed ironing-day in Mrs. Dean's establishment ever since Maggie could remember. That energetic woman doubtless knew why she turned the house into universal chaos once a week, which to the general eye seemed in the same speckless condition at one time as another, subjecting the innocent carpets to a vigorous sweeping that seemed to own a vindictive motive of some kind, and taking the minutest pains with the dusting. Maggie, who had escaped a share in these proceedings when at school, now bore a part with lively protest.

"I think it wears out the carpets to sweep them so much," she said, shrewdly attacking her mother in a vulnerable point; but the latter only replied that she guessed it wore out Maggie's feelings a good deal more, adding that she noticed the latter were not of the best wearing quality.

"I don't see the use of making such a fuss," Maggie went on, in the independent manner of our free-born youth. "Mrs. Fay doesn't do that way. She only sweeps when it's needed, and a little at a time, and no one is disturbed."

"That's one way," Mrs. Dean said, in a tone that defined her opinion of it. "That's what you might expect from some folks — ministers' wives."

"Their house looks a great deal better than ours."

"I've been there," was the brief reply. "Books and papers scattered round everywhere, and things strung from one end of the house to the other. Mrs. Fay had to take her bunnit off the sofa before I could sit down."

"Well, that's what I like," said Maggie perversely. "I like a house to look as if somebody lived in it and used things. Ours looks so stiff, especially this room," glancing discontentedly about the little parlor, with its hair-cloth chairs, and the small table standing between the windows, holding an album and subscription copy of the Life of Grant. She had always disliked the parlor more than any room in the house. A wicked impulse came over her to tumble the chairs over each other, and to roll the respectable sofa into the middle of the room. She resisted it, contenting herself with shifting the Life of Grant to another corner of the table, and dropping a newspaper on the floor as if by accident, but really to test the effect, which must have been disappointing, for she picked it up again, and, drawing down the shades, went out of the room, closing the door behind her, and leaving it to another week's undisturbed stillness.

The sitting-room pleased her better, for, though the rag carpet on the floor was undeniably ugly, it had a neat and cheerful look, while the tall clock in the corner and her mother's work-basket gave it an air of homelike use and comfort. Helen's desk, surmounted with a few bookshelves, stood in another corner. The collection of books was small but care-

fully chosen, mostly with reference to the owner's studies in the Emerson club. There was a complete set of the books of the writer who gave his name to the class, a few volumes of modern poets, and George Eliot's novels. Maggie was quite proud of Helen's bookcase, which imparted an intellectual tone to the house it would otherwise have been quite bereft of. Her only regret was that Helen would not keep it in the parlor, where an occasional visitor might see and be impressed by it, such a caller as Sidney Gale for instance.

Maggie had not forgotten the promised visit; but she said to herself, as the time drew near, that of course he would not come after the way she had behaved to him at the reception, and it pleased her to believe that it would be her fault if he did not. To help support her in this belief, she half inclined to accompany her mother, after the tea-things were put away, to visit a sick neighbor, but this perhaps would be carrying things too far. Her father and Helen were away, and, glad to escape from the house, she went out of doors and began wandering idly about the yard. It was not long before she heard the sound of wheels on the bridge; and the next moment a carriage had stopped before the gate, while its occupant leaned forward and bade her a gay good-evening. Maggie returned the greeting rather coolly, but her cheek flushed, and her visitor did not seem discouraged.

"Don't you want to take a ride?" he asked. She hesitated a moment, and if the speaker had been

nearer he would have noted the pleased flash in her eyes, but it died out in a moment.

"I can't," she said carelessly. "Everybody is away, and I must take care of the house."

"What's the matter with the house?" Gale asked. She smiled feebly, but made no reply.

"All right, then; I'm coming in," he said, throwing the reins over the dashboard and springing from the carriage. In a moment he had fastened the horse, then came quickly through the gate towards her, extending his hand in friendly fashion. It would have suited them both better to remain outdoors, but Maggie felt that the visit would lose half its importance if not surrounded with all the proper ceremonies, and led the way into the house. When they had mounted the short flight of steps leading to the front door, she found, to her mortification, that it was locked. Hurriedly bidding her companion wait, she ran round to the side entrance to let him in. She was nervous and embarrassed when she opened the door, and could summon none of her usual spirit to respond as he raised his hat with mock courtesy and inquired if Miss Dean was in. She led the way into the parlor, which was stiflingly hot, having been closed all day, and hastened to open the windows; while a humiliating sense of injury rose within her as she remembered how differently they did things at the Fays', where the whole house stood open from morning to night, and visitors were received without ceremony. She fancied that Sidney Gale was taking a mental inventory of his surroundings, and for a

moment she hated him for coming; but when she turned towards him she saw only the same look of smiling unconcern which he usually wore.

"Weren't you expecting me?" he asked, after they had seated themselves. "You know you invited me to come."

"I invited you!" Maggie exclaimed, recovering her usual manner. "You invited yourself."

"Is that so?" reflectively. "Perhaps I did. Some people are born to the good things they get in this world, some have them thrust on them, some achieve them. I achieve mine."

Maggie found no reply to this except a rather aimless "Oh!" She was uneasy. A heavy, scuffling step on the back porch told of her father's return. The next moment he had entered the house, and, hearing the sound of voices in the parlor, drew near and stood awkwardly on the threshold. Maggie rose to her feet, but before she could speak he had turned away with an abashed look at the discovery that Maggie had a young gentleman visitor. A vivid scarlet flushed her cheek, while Sidney Gale dropped his eyes to the floor to hide the laughter in them. Maggie stepped to the door.

"Did you want me, father?" she asked, in a dutiful tone; but there was only an indistinct murmur in reply, and she returned to her place.

Gale then began talking in his quick, easy strain, asking her what she had been doing with herself since vacation, declaring it was an age since he had seen her.

"You treated me pretty badly at the reception," he said, "but I have a nature that never retains a grudge."

"Your nature is very soft and amiable, I have no doubt."

"I don't know whether to take that as a compliment, or not," appearing to revolve the matter in his mind, "but I suppose a little softness is necessary to the amiability." Leaning towards her and balancing himself on the edge of his chair, he fixed a pair of expressive eyes on her.

"Why won't you come to ride?" he asked, and began to plead with her. "We can drive into the country, and return by moonlight. There's a full moon. The roads are in a prime condition after last night's rain."

Such an invitation had an enticing sound, but Maggie was in a sensitive mood, and her fancy instantly darted beneath the words and extracted an injurious meaning. She turned her keen bright eyes on her visitor, while the lines about her mouth grew a little firmer. "Drive into the country." If he had asked Laura Danvers to drive, would he have been so particular to specify the direction they should take? A feeling of resentment swept over her, and a new desire to punish Sidney Gale.

"I've seen the full moon," she said superciliously.

"I was afraid you had. I'd throw in a couple of comets and the *aurora borealis* if I could, but there's no pleasing some people."

Maggie paid no heed to this. A daring thought

had presented itself to her. She hesitated a moment, then gathered courage and spoke again.

"I have a book of Fanny Brown's I should like to return. You may take me there if you like."

Fanny Brown lived at the other end of the town, and they would have to pass through Main Street to get there. There was a hint of a challenge in this request, but if Maggie looked to see any sign of wavering or embarrassment, she was disappointed. Gale rose to his feet with polite alacrity, and in a few moments they were seated in the carriage with the horse's head turned towards the village. After they had crossed the railroad tracks, Maggie leaned impulsively forward and took the reins into her own hands. "Let me drive," she said, and Gale, giving lazy assent, adjusted himself to a comfortable position in the corner of the carriage.

He saw he was in for a little lark, and rather enjoyed the prospect. It was evident that Maggie was still angry with him, but there are certain kinds of feminine displeasure as gratifying to a man's self-love as any demonstration of friendliness, and he was conscious of admiring her all the more in these contrary moods. She had never looked prettier than now, her slim figure sitting proudly upright beside him, with that excited color in her cheeks and a dangerous sparkle in her eyes. It had taken but a moment for Maggie to mature her plan of action. She meant to drive straight down Main Street, always crowded at this hour with pleasure-seekers, in full sight of everybody, with Sidney Gale. That was the way she would

punish people for saying that he only sought her society secretly, and for daring to speak slightingly of her. This act of public vindication accomplished, she meant to punish Sidney Gale in turn by dropping him completely and forever, never to speak nor look at him again. Thus would she clear her conscience of all blame, and at the same time secure her own triumph amid the general humiliation of her enemies. She flapped the reins on the dashboard and urged the horse forward. That surprised animal turned his head to look at her.

"Flora thought you were driving," said Gale, in his laziest tone. "I haven't learned to flap the reins myself."

"Oh! I dare say my driving isn't very scientific," Maggie replied.

"Well, you needn't be discouraged. Science may reach it some day. Save the pieces," he added, as the carriage rolled swiftly over a cross-walk and tilted wildly on the springs, remarking that he neglected to take out an accident policy before he started. Maggie bent forward and took the whip from its socket.

"I guess I wouldn't do that," he said. "Flora doesn't like the whip. She is a reasoning creature in spite of her sex. Moral suasion suits her a good deal better."

"If I am to drive Flora, she will do as I say," Maggie replied, twisting the reins about her hands and still keeping hold of the whip.

"All right," said Gale, in careless resignment.

They made a sharp turn of the corner that led down Main Street, the carriage lurching dangerously to one side and dislodging its owner from his easy position. Maggie no sooner caught sight of the busy street, with its shops and the throng of people on each side, than her resolution suddenly gave way, and a feeling of sickening shame came over her. The horse was travelling now at a swift trot, which attracted the attention of every one on the street. In the doorway of one of the stores she caught sight of her sister's alarmed and surprised face, and among a group of young women on their way to the weekly prayer-meeting she saw the figure of Laura Danvers. Her dislike of the task she had set herself increased every moment, and she longed now for nothing so much as to be out of sight of the world whose observation she had so boldly courted a few moments before. With this feeling uppermost, impatient of every obstacle that hindered her escape, she pulled wildly on the reins, and in a moment of desperation struck the horse with the whip.

"What are you doing?" Gale cried, seizing the reins; but he was too late. The misused animal had sprung sharply to one side, hurling the carriage against a heavy farm-wagon, overturning and spilling both occupants on the ground.

An excited crowd gathered about them. The horse was secured, the broken vehicle restored to an upright position, while the two victims of the disaster immediately became the centre of an idle and curious group of spectators. Maggie, who was the least

hurt of the two, was assisted to a hotel near by. A sprained wrist and a few skin-bruises covered her injuries, but Sidney Gale's were of a severer nature, as a bleeding cut on the face and a broken arm hanging limply at his side testified. He was borne away for repairs to a surgeon's office near by, and had ample time to reflect on many things before his recovery.

Helen Dean had hurried at once to her sister's side, but, learning the slight results of the accident, left her in the care of others to be sent home when she should have recovered from her fright, while she hastened on in advance to inform her parents of what had occurred, before any exaggerated report should reach them. It was a great relief to Maggie that she was not to return home with Helen, nor would she allow any one else to go with her. With her bandaged wrist and a strip of court plaster covering a scratch on her cheek, she seated herself alone in the hack which had been summoned to convey her, leaning her aching head against the cushions.

The stormy feelings within made her head ache more than any physical hurt she had received. She was thoroughly frightened and displeased with herself, but she was also still too angry with other people to feel true repentance. The thing she had contemplated as a means of self-defence had turned out to be another proof of her folly. People would talk more than ever now. A sense of outraged justice mingled with her humiliation, hard to bear. Doubtless there is a germ of innocent intention in the most hardened criminal, which makes the prescribed penalty

appear in very unjust relation to the thing punished. How much more, then, should a girl like Maggie feel the disproportion between the motive and effect of this latest piece of folly?

Her parents and Helen were standing in the little sitting-room with distressed and anxious looks when she opened the door and confronted them. She was pale, and trembled in every limb, sinking feebly into the nearest chair. The members of the Dean family indulged in few demonstrations towards each other, and for a moment the three only looked at the returned culprit without speaking.

"Well, miss, you've given us a pretty fright!" her mother exclaimed, her voice pitched in a high key, to cover whatever emotion she felt. Maggie made no reply, only raised a pair of weak hands to remove her hat. It was her father who stepped forward and with clumsy fingers assisted her, laying the hat on the table and looking down at her with a troubled face.

"It's nothing," she said, looking up at him with an ineffectual attempt to smile. "I shall be better in a moment;" and Thomas Dean, vainly trying to suppress a queer sound in his throat, turned abruptly away.

"You might have been killed," her mother continued, in the same high, admonitory key, as if she found some excuse for reproof in the fact that Maggie was still alive.

"Well, we're mighty thankful 'tain't no worse," her father said, in a conciliatory tone.

"Oh! I'm not badly hurt," said Maggie, recovering herself. "Mr. Gale was hurt much worse. His right arm is broken." She had an idea that this voluntary mention of the companion of her escapade helped to relieve her of its odium, but no one seemed interested in Mr. Gale. Helen spoke no word either of gratitude or sympathy, only kept regarding her sister with stern, questioning eyes that Maggie found unbearable, at last rising from her chair, saying she would go to her room.

"Yes, you'd better get to bed right away," her father answered.

"And I'll make you a cup of ginger tea, and put some hot draughts to your feet," said her mother, who desired some outlet for the energies such a crisis had developed.

"For pity's sake, what for?" Maggie exclaimed petulantly, appalled at the prospect of having to undergo a course of maternal doctoring.

"There, there, don't bother the child," her father said. "All she needs is a good night's sleep. I guess she don't want no hot draughts," and Maggie was allowed to depart in peace to her room. But before she went she did an unusual thing. She went to her father and raised her face for a good-night kiss. He flushed with surprise, but bestowed it heartily.

"Good-night, my little girl, good-night," he said, in a freer manner than his wont, evoked by hers. Then Maggie turned and looked full at her sister. Some way she felt less afraid of her now that she

had kissed her father. Helen could not think her such a very bad girl after that.

The older daughter turned to her parents when they were alone.

"Is Maggie engaged to Henry Parsons?" she asked abruptly. Her mother looked surprised, but disposed of the subject in her usual fashion. "Don't ask me," she said, shrugging her shoulders. Helen turned mutely to her father, who was regarding her with astonishment.

"Why, of course, they're engaged; leastways, it's the same thing. They've growed up together." Helen turned away discouraged. It would be cruel to pierce this simple faith with any of her own troublesome doubts. She had learned long since to dispense with much sympathy or understanding in her mother, and there were many things about which her father could not help her. The half-shaped fears that continually beset her about Maggie were something she must settle and clear away for herself. This was not easy, and she sometimes grew weary of a sense of responsibility which had no power to win any answering sign of gratitude or trust, but she was not one to shirk a duty because it was likely to prove a thankless one.

When she went upstairs she found Maggie still dressed, who rose hurriedly from the bed where she had thrown herself.

"Why are you not in bed?" Helen asked. She spoke in a severer tone than she intended, a thing that often happened, and hindered, she knew, the

progress she might have made in her sister's confidence.

Maggie murmured some excuse, and repeated what she had said before, that she was not much hurt anyway, and there was no need to make a fuss.

"Then you can listen to me. I have something to say to you."

Maggie made no reply, standing before the glass and taking out her hairpins, awkwardly, with one hand.

"Are you engaged to Henry Parsons?" Helen asked abruptly.

"No." The answer was short and immediate, and had the effect of a small explosion. There was a moment's silence in the little chamber.

"Perhaps, then," her sister went on, in an upbraiding tone, "you are engaged to Sidney Gale."

"Engaged — engaged — I am sick of the word," was the impatient reply.

"Then, I hope Henry Parsons feels in the same way. He is too good a man to be trifled with," was the warm response. Maggie leaned towards the mirror to investigate a small new scratch she had discovered, and adjust a bit of court-plaster.

"If you have refused him, why does he keep coming here?" Helen went on; but Maggie only raised her eyebrows and perked up her chin with a saucy movement, in sign of her inability to solve abstruse problems. Her sister, after regarding her with hopeless dissatisfaction, abandoned this point of attack and took up another.

"Why were you out riding with Sidney Gale?"

"I wasn't out riding with him. I only asked him to take me to Fanny Brown's."

"I thought he was to marry his cousin, Laura Danvers."

"What of that?" was the pettish reply. "Can't a person look at any one else? I should think we were living in the Middle Ages." Maggie would have found it hard to explain just what the Middle Ages had to do with the subject in hand, but that did not diminish the sense of having made a crushing argument.

"It's of no use, Maggie," her sister said, after another interval of silence, and speaking in a hurt tone. "I am six years older than you, and understand a great many things you know nothing about. It is my place to help you, but you will not let me. You deceive me and shut me out from your confidence. I hope nobody may ever cause you the pain you are causing me."

Maggie was a little ashamed. There was no one whose good opinion she valued more than her sister's if only it were not so difficult to obtain. She hesitated and stammered in her reply.

"I — I don't know what you mean by confidence, and I have not deceived you. You asked me if I was engaged to Henry Parsons, and I said no."

"Do you mean that you have refused him?"

"I — I don't know as you would call it a refusal — exactly," then, no longer able to meet her sister's look, she broke out in petulant protest. "There

never was a girl so bothered and worried as I am," she cried, the quick tears beginning to flow. "Here I have just escaped a dreadful accident. I might have been killed, but nobody cares. All you do is to scold and find fault with me. And my wrist hurts me dreadfully."

She sank down on a chair and began to unwind the bandage round her wrist, tears of childish grief running down her cheeks. There was a touch of honest complaint in her words, and Helen felt that she had spoken inopportunely. In atonement for this error, and real sympathy for her sister's suffering, she set to work to relieve it, bathing the injured wrist in cold water, and rebandaging it for the night. More important moral crises than this have been averted by so simple a plea as a sprained wrist. Maggie was conscious of a definite sense of relief, while she submitted resignedly, and with a little air of injured innocence, to her sister's nursing, thanking her when she had finished in a patient tone, which carried an accent of forgiveness along with it. The two sisters completed their preparations for the night in silence without recurrence to any disagreeable topic. In a few moments the light was extinguished, and they lay side by side, each revolving her own troubled thoughts, until the external darkness stole inwards and both slept.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN IMPETUOUS LOVER.

Henry Parsons was not in town at the time of the accident, but he heard of it the first thing on his return the next day. He had returned to the farm-house where he had been staying, to complete preparations for his coming departure, intending to spend the few days intervening in Litchfield. It was a perfect summer morning, bright and not too warm, when he seated himself in the buggy to drive back to the village. He was in an unusually cheerful frame of mind, and the day was one which fostered his mood.

The sight of waving fields and green woods, past which his horse carried him in a contented trot, brought a sense of grateful happiness, and seemed the natural ministers of the youthful hopes he carried in his heart.

Henry Parsons was not of that harsh and ascetic temperament which his words and manner sometimes indicated. The self-denial and ceaseless industry which had guided his life overlaid a nature warm and sensitive. He missed the gift of self-expression, hoarding the rich treasures of sentiment and feeling in his own breast until the need of imparting them to a sympathetic heart was like an ache. This

morning his habitual mood of serious reflection was lifted for a time, and his own thoughts were of the kind that afforded him cheerful and sufficient company, joining in the matin song of the birds above his head. The sore feelings about himself, his lonely lot and the privations he had suffered, were abated for a while, lost in a strong, hopeful assurance of good things to come. The blood of a healthy and resolute young manhood flowed in his veins, a high purpose filled his soul, and the breath of young love warmed his heart. The thought of Maggie was present in all he saw and heard. He wished she were by his side, yet hardly knew he wished it, so completely did the mere thought of her satisfy him. Absent, his imagination could construe all those kindly looks and words he might have sorely missed in her presence.

For the passing moment he had the same feeling of peace and security in regard to Maggie as towards the rest of the world. He no longer blamed her for her behavior towards him, but made large and loving excuse for her, defending her against himself and condemning his own impatience. He resolved to behave very differently in the future, to command her confidence and good opinion in a different way. He meant to see as much of her as possible during the rest of his stay, but not to fret and tease her with a lover's importunities; to be very wise and discreet, and, by keeping himself under strict control, re-establish the old friendly relation between them, and so win her perhaps unawares. He had been harsh and

exacting towards her. Because he had grown old before his time, compelled to think and care for himself from childhood, was a stupid reason for expecting Maggie to behave in the same grave and reasonable fashion. She was but a child, with a child's liking for the bright and lively side of life. No wonder she pouted and grew cross when he tried to impose his plain, strict notions on her. He would do that no more, but so conduct himself towards her that she should feel the same ease and happy contentment in his presence as in others'. Thus with his heart all aglow with hope and good resolve he drove into town.

The news of the accident gave him a great fright at first, followed by heartfelt relief that the consequences were no more serious; but other very unpleasant sensations arose when he learned the particulars of what had happened. These were conveyed to him in the most disagreeable manner, with peculiar nods and winks and pretended attempts at sympathy, from a group of idle young fellows, who gathered about him and related the story, now grown to be the town's talk, of the flirtation between Maggie and Sidney Gale. Parsons, angry and amazed, tried to answer his tormentors in their own vein, but his jealous mortification and pain were too manifest. Naturally enough, the story of Maggie's acquaintance with her newest admirer had gained exaggerated proportions, and Parsons, hearing it for the first time, was quite unable to separate the true from the false, even had he been in a mood to discriminate. But the

main facts of the case were bad enough, and he now read all of Maggie's late conduct in the light of this discovery. She had another lover than himself, who until now believed he stood alone in any possible thought of hers on such subjects. She had been in the habit of meeting this lover secretly. He had given her flowers and they had quarrelled. The knowledge that facts like these could only have been disclosed by the idle boasting of one whose duty it was to preserve silence, added tenfold to Parsons's rage, and, dizzy with pain and a horrible dread, he turned his steps towards the railroad.

Maggie was alone. Her mother, taking advantage of a bargain sale, had gone to the village to replenish her stock of table-linen. Mrs. Dean had little faith in bargain sales of any description, and interrupted her preparations to attend this one with many expressions of scornful unbelief.

"It's all humbug," she said, as she put on her bonnet. "'Below cost,' indeed! Does any one suppose that George Fairchild has made all his money by giving away his goods? He needn't think he can palm off any of his cheap stuff on me. It's risky buyin' damask anyway, the starch fills it up so; but I generally know what I'm buyin'! I suppose I may as well lay in a couple of tablecloths."

"I wish you wouldn't get the unbleached, though," murmured Maggie, in spiritless fashion, listening to all this talk with her external hearing chiefly.

"Why not? They wear white, and last a good deal longer."

"They wear out first. It's like Arnold's writing-fluid. It turns black, they say; but I like an ink that's black in the first place."

"You'd like the world made in a minute if you could have your way. People should be a little forehanded. We've got to think about to-morrow and next week as well as to-day."

"I like to-day a great deal better," Maggie replied, but this statement was not literally correct. Already to-day had become a perplexing problem to her, which she was trying vainly to solve. The same feelings of injury and angry resentment remained which she had felt the night before, to which was added a helpless discouragement, as she strove to think her way clearly out of the difficulties into which she had fallen. Her indignation with Sidney Gale increased every time she thought of him. She declared him to be the sole cause of all her trouble, at the same time that her conscience pricked her with a remembrance of her own share of folly, and honest remorse for the injuries he had received. She wanted to put these mixed feelings into shape in some way, and determined to write Sidney Gale a letter.

What a strange, foolish comfort is that which comes from pouring out our feelings on paper, rising from the fatuous delusion that here as nowhere else we shall be able to present that clear mental likeness of ourselves which the injured or injuring friend cannot mistake! Maggie was still too young to know how vain are most of our attempts at self-explanation, how difficult it is to permeate another consciousness

with our own personality and its claims. She was burning with a sense of general injury which she determined to resist and put an end to.

After her mother had gone, she got out her writing materials and sat down to her task. She had but a vague idea of what she wanted to say, but that did not in the least diminish her determination to say it. It should be something that, while it aimed to be very magnanimous, should yet clear herself from all blame, and leave the reader with a deserved sense of culpability, mingled with admiration for her own generous behavior. To fortify herself in her resolve, she directed an envelope first, and laid it to one side. She sat nibbling the end of a pen and frowning at the sheet of paper before her, when she was interrupted by a quick footstep ascending the steps outside, and, rising hastily, she stood facing Henry Parsons. For a moment they looked at each other without speaking, a shock of mutual intelligence darting from one to the other and holding them in a moment's startled attention. He noticed her bandaged wrist and the strip of court-plaster on her cheek, and, though signs of injury like these had little power to affect him in his present state of mind, it was natural to make them the subject of his opening remarks.

"You have been hurt," he said, in a voice more upbraiding than sympathetic.

"Yes, a little," she replied lightly. "But it is of no consequence. Won't you sit down?" indicating a chair. "Mr. Gale was hurt much worse than I."

"I did not come here to talk about Mr. Gale," was the quick reply, spoken in a tone that belied the words.

Maggie paused a moment in the arrangement of the papers she was gathering up to put away. It looked as if things were to go on from bad to worse, and with a feeling of exaggerated self-pity she rather welcomed this evidence of additional coming injury towards herself. She felt helpless to stem the current of anger she saw setting towards her, and grew careless of results.

"What did you come for?" she asked. "To pick a quarrel?"

"I came to tell you that I know everything. You have deceived me. All this time that you have been encouraging and leading me on, you have been receiving the attentions of another man. The whole town is talking of your flirtation with Sidney Gale."

These last words stung Maggie to the quick. "And you believe what a lot of silly gossips say?" she cried impetuously. He looked at her in amazement.

"Do you mean to say it is not true?" he asked, "that you have not received attentions from him, and that you did not go to ride with him last night?"

"That is nonsense," she broke in. "If you call that" —

"And that he was not in the habit of meeting you after school and walking home with you? that it was not he who gave you those flowers" —

"What flowers?"

"And that it was not because you were angry with him that you gave them to me and made me a public laughing-stock? Maggie — Maggie," his voice breaking here, "what had I done that you should treat me like that?"

Maggie was aghast at this minute revelation of her affairs. In a flash of swift and shamed enlightenment she saw it all. It was Sidney Gale himself who, with bragging egotism, had confided this version of her conduct to his familiar cronies about town. Never before had she felt so bitterly the humiliation of her position, but the high, reprimanding tone which Parsons had assumed aroused all her spirit.

"You do not know what you are talking about," she said. "If — if you understood such matters at all, you would know that when a young man gives a girl flowers and she cares no more for them than to give them to — to some other young man, he would take it as a compliment and" —

"I don't know how other young men feel," Parsons broke in hotly. "There are young men perhaps who are willing to be made a tool of." He strode angrily across the room, stopping near the table, where his eye caught sight of the directed envelope. "Even now you are writing to him," he cried, seizing the envelope and holding it before her as if challenging her to deny it. His manner offended her even more than his words. She stepped towards him and took the envelope from him with an air of cool proprietorship.

"It is quite true," she said, looking steadily at

him. "I was writing to him. What of that? I have a right to do so if I choose. I am not responsible to you for my actions." She spoke the last words with a slow significance that made her listener pale. "The sooner we understand each other, the better," she went on, in growing excitement. "Last Sunday you wanted me to answer a certain question of yours, and I asked you to wait. You need wait no longer. I will answer it now."

There was not a word of reply from the mute, averted figure before her, and Maggie felt herself growing stronger with every word. In spite of her excitement, she could not help being aware of the dramatic character of the situation. She felt that she was doing it very well.

"You are very fond of telling me my faults," she went on, delaying the execution of her threat. "I will tell you some of yours. You are tyrannical and meanly suspicious." Here the tall figure drew a long, deep breath and turned its eyes slowly towards her. "You listen to a lot of mean, contemptible gossip," she went on excitedly, finding it difficult to preserve her former manner, "and then come here and make all manner of accusations against me. And because I will not stoop to defend myself" — here she paused to brush an angry tear from her cheek. "Not for the world would I marry a man like that."

He looked at her with sharp mistrust. "And that is your answer, is it?"

"That is my answer," she replied, in her stateliest manner.

"Do you think I do not know what all this means? You do not love me. You never have. If you loved me, you would not care whether I was tyrannical or not." Maggie opened her eyes at this.

"Perhaps not, but if you want to marry a Circassian slave you had better go to India."

He had it on his tongue to tell her that he was going to Dakota instead, and by the midnight train; but he doubted its effect.

"You do not love me," he repeated, in the same accusing tone. "You care more for a miserable little popinjay like Sidney Gale, than for an honest man, who has loved you all his life."

"You can abuse Mr. Gale behind his back if you like, of course. He cannot defend himself."

"Oh! he knows how to defend himself," said Parsons. "He defends himself by rehearsing his young lady conquests." The words had no sooner escaped his lips than he was bitterly ashamed of them. Maggie turned quite white.

"How dare you?" she exclaimed. "Not another word," raising her hand as he opened his lips to speak. "Leave me, and never come near me again." She pointed to the door.

"Maggie, for Heaven's sake listen to me!"

"I will not listen to another word," she cried, still pointing to the door. He cast a long, despairing look at her, which she returned with that of an insulted goddess, then silently obeyed its mute signal.

Left alone, her shame and misery culminated, and she threw herself down in a chair, and wept bitterly.

The first violence of emotion spent, she was indulging in a gentle after-shower of grief, feeling herself the unhappiest and most abused girl in the world, when the clock struck, warning her of her mother's near return. She rose hastily to put away her papers and prepare to meet her. Catching sight of the directed envelope, she seized and tore it into minute fragments, with a sudden fierce energy, that seemed to bear a personal motive of some kind. Maggie's epistolary efforts in this direction ended here, and Sidney Gale never received his letter.

CHAPTER IX.

A FAREWELL VISIT.

PARSONS spent the remainder of the day in restless excitement and despair. All resentful feelings were overlaid for a time by a stinging remorse, and he would have given much to recall the words which had closed his interview with Maggie, and banished him from her presence. But, sincere as was this feeling, a hopeless conviction lay beneath, which warned him it would be useless to see her again. He could no longer doubt the real state of affairs between them. Nothing was plainer than that Maggie did not love him. She had met all his reproaches and demands for an explanation of her conduct — just demands, he still believed them — with proud resentment, untouched by any softer emotion. He had been unable to move her, except to anger her. Not the least feeling for him nor desire to keep and merit his good opinion mingled with her indignation. She had never cared for him. He had been nothing but a bore and obstacle to her, that she was glad to free herself from at last, taking quick advantage of his mad words to send him away from her. It would be folly to try to see her again, and, since there was no other motive for remaining in Litchfield, he might as well leave at once. Going back to the hotel, he packed up his few

possessions, and, that no fleeting impulse of a contrary nature might change his purpose, bought his ticket. The price covered nearly half his savings, but his heart was too sore to feel any forebodings over this. Dread of the future was changed into indifference, and the pain of separating himself from lifelong associations into an eager wish to escape from the conditions which had brought about his present suffering. He had always meant to leave Litchfield, half hating the place as he did because of the dark, ugly stain it had left on his innocent boyhood and struggling youth. It would be strange indeed if he were to take to sentimentalizing over it now. His preparations for departure at an end, there still remained twelve hours to dispose of before he could go. A part of this time was spent in a farewell visit to his old friend, Mr. Fay. The minister was greatly surprised at the news of this sudden leave-taking, and, with the privilege of his position, pressed for the reasons, but Parsons evaded him.

"I am all ready to go," he said. "There is nothing to keep me here," with a touch of bitterness the other did not notice, "so I may as well start."

"Well, well," said his clerical guardian, "I suppose so, but it seems pretty sudden. Let me see," putting on his spectacles and moving slowly toward his desk, "I was to give you some letters, wasn't I? I don't know as they will do you any good. I have received a good many letters of introduction myself, but I'm afraid they haven't increased the feeling of obligation to my deserving fellow-beings as they

should. The best letter of introduction a young man can carry is in his face. If there's no word of recommendation to be read there, the written ones are not of much account."

"You are rather discouraging," the young man said, with a forced smile.

"Tut, tut," the other replied, "don't be mock modest. You don't think so poorly of Henry Parsons as you'd have us think."

"I don't think very well of him just now, I can assure you."

"Ah, well, that's natural too. Every man falls out of love with himself at times," though the rector was not aware he ever had. "Now, let's see," settling himself leisurely in his chair and drawing a block of paper before him. "There's Rev. Charles Austin of Fargo. If you stop there, you must call on him. He was a classmate of mine. I remember we used to dispute a good deal about the first chapter of John. He's a good deal of a mystic, Austin is; a bit of a pagan too, takes Hegel to interpret Christianity with, and falls back on Plato to support Paul. But then," correcting himself, "Austin's a good fellow. He will be glad to see you. He will tell you I was the most promising young man in the class. I dare say he wonders why I haven't redeemed the pledge of my youthful precocity, but I can trust you not to let him into that secret. Then, there's Col. Easton of Bismarck," the rector went on, in his slow, refined accent. "He was the Sunday-school superintendent in my first parish. I must give you a letter to him.

He's a practical man. I dare say he can give you a lift — great politician, I'm told" —

"I sha'n't go into politics," Parsons said, rather bluntly.

"No? Well, perhaps you're right. Politics is getting to be a nasty kind of business." The rector was one of those mild censors of his own country who like to condemn it in an occasional phrase borrowed from the older civilization across the water. "And the trouble is, all the decent young men feel as you do, so I don't see when things are going to improve. If grumbling at a bad thing and letting it alone could improve it, our national politics would have been purified long ago. But I'm not advising you to go into politics, you know," looking quickly up at his visitor, as if in dread that this general criticism might be supposed to point to some definite line of action. "I know one or two lawyers in Bismarck too. You will be more interested in them. One of them is my nephew — getting rich through a lucky investment in mines, I hear, something he dipped into while waiting for a practice. You have to wait for a practice out there, as elsewhere, you know. You mustn't expect to find a crowd of clients waiting for you to come along and hang your sign out."

"I am not expecting it," Parsons replied, with the patient air of one who is required to pay respectful attention to the meaningless advice of his superiors.

"Well, now, I'll write my letters. I think I will write to Austin first. I am always conscious of a little strain on the intellect when I write to Austin.

I never can think of a point sufficiently remote and recondite to begin on. It never does to talk to Austin about the weather; he doesn't know there is any. I think I'll tackle him on the last encyclical message from Rome." He took up his pen, and Parsons began moving about the room on pretence of examining the books.

"You might go into the sitting-room and wait," the rector said. "Bertha is there."

"I would rather stay here," said Parsons, not catching at first the other's hinted wish, and feeling unable to support the burden of a half-hour's conversation with the minister's daughter. "That is," he added, "unless I disturb you."

"I shall have to admit that you do," the minister replied. "The truth is that I am so accustomed to being by myself when I write, that I doubt if I could compose an order to the grocer if any one were with me. It's a great weakness. I mean to correct it some day," in the hopeful tone of one who sees a long future before him in which to execute the virtuous resolutions of the present.

Parsons found Bertha sitting by an open window, sewing. She looked very womanly and domestic, he thought, with her work-basket standing near, and her fingers busily plying their task. He had never seen Maggie sewing, and had often heard her say she hated it. Above her head a canary hung in its cage and poured forth a joyful *roulade* of trilling notes as Parsons came forward and rather unwillingly seated himself near her. He had rapidly decided there was no need

to speak of his coming departure to Bertha until he had received his letters and it was time to make the family a formal farewell; but the necessity for telling her arose when she spoke of a church social to be held at the rectory that evening, and expressed the wish that he should be present.

"Going to-night?" she exclaimed, when Parsons had made his excuse. Then, without reflection, and still under the impulse of her first surprise, "Does Maggie know?" She blushed painfully as soon as the words were spoken, then plunged forward into another kind of talk to cover her confusion. Why did he go so soon? Her mother would be disappointed. She had meant to make a little farewell company for him. Why did he go off to Dakota anyway? Did he despise Litchfield so much? Soon there would be no young men left. But perhaps she would take a trip West sometime; her father was talking of a vacation trip to Denver, taking her with him. Well, she hoped he would be very successful.

Parsons listened with an abstracted air, while the canary, in emulative fury at this unusual flow of talk from his quiet mistress, hopped wildly on his perch and poured out a very cataract of high, piercing song. It was not long before the study door opened and the rector called Parsons. He rose and bade Bertha good-by, leaving a farewell message for her mother.

"There they are," the minister said, handing him the letters. "You must go to hear Austin preach. You'll connect yourself with the church, of course?"

"I suppose so," the young man said, rather indif-

ferently, and thanked the rector for his kindness, who politely disclaimed the need. "You must write," he went on. "I'm not a very good correspondent myself, but one of us will answer your letters. I sha'n't bother you with any advice or good wishes," he added, laying his hand on the young man's shoulder. "I expect good things of you, and shall not like it if you disappoint me. It's a great bore having to change your opinion of people, and involves the waste of a good deal of time. Don't you put me to that trouble. That's all I have to say."

"I wish I better deserved your good opinion," said Parsons, with true humility, "and all the help you have given me, but I'm afraid the best thing about me is that you and a few others took a notion to believe in me."

"I hardly think we merely took a notion," the minister replied, in his easy tone. "Belief in our fellows is usually reached by a more difficult process," with a smile of amiable cynicism. "Some of us saw a young man who seemed to have the right kind of stuff in him, working hard to help himself up in the world, and we said that was the kind of job we liked to have a hand in." The young man inwardly winced a little at the expression, "up in the world."

"If you had turned out worse and disappointed us, we might have called it a case of pure benevolence; but as you have more than justified the expectations of your friends, they can only look on their interest in you as a sound investment, which proves their own

sagacity." Parsons smiled a little. This sort of talk fell pleasantly enough on the ear, but failed to satisfy a deeper hunger that craved a word of more heroic cheer and counsel.

"The worst is about over with now, I suspect. You have had a rather hard struggle, but that will teach you how to hold on to what you have got. You are industrious and plucky, with no bad habits, and you have a head on your shoulders. You'll get along."

"I don't know about that. I doubt if the worst is over for a young man simply because he has read a few text-books and doesn't drink. He may have a weakness that is as injurious as a bad habit."

"Yes, we all have our weaknesses, but I wouldn't be too hard on them. I confess to a little sympathy with a brother clergyman who said he liked a man to have an occasional vice or two." Then, as he caught the despondent look on the other's face, he dropped this tone, and spoke with a little more seriousness. "Are you in any real trouble, Henry?"

"Nothing that any one can help me about," was the hurried reply.

"If it is anything about money matters," — the minister began.

"No — no — it's not that. I have all the money I need. I was only wondering why a man's faculty for blundering never taught him anything. There's a useful theory that our mistakes constitute our best means of knowledge. I wish I were a proof of it."

"Goethe says something on that point somewhere,

— I think it is Goethe," the other said musingly. "He explains it by saying that experience never presents us with the opportunity to repeat the old mistake, but only with conditions for committing a new one. It's like trying to master a burglar-proof lock. There are any number of combinations all leading to the same end of opening the safe, but knowledge of one doesn't help to understand the others."

"And there is no one principle running through the whole?" the young man asked, with an anxious note in his voice.

"I can't say that, but if there is, I suspect the man who made the safe is the only one who knows it, unless," he added, with his easy laugh, "it is the burglar who robs it."

"Then wisdom may be as easily acquired by cheating methods as any other?"

"Well, if the burglary led to the man's punishment and subsequent reformation — I see that my roundabout way of talking displeases you a little," noting a rising frown on his listener's face; "but wait till you are as old as I am and you'll find your definitions not so easy a fit as they are now. The young would like to settle all questions with a single line of division, like the sheep and the goats. Theologically speaking, I believe, of course, in the sheep and the goats; but, as an unprejudiced observer and rather indifferent student of natural history in its human offshoot, I suspect the existence of a hybrid species, covered with neither fleece nor hair, but developing a new means of protection in" —

"In philosophy?" the young man inquired, with a satirical accent.

"Thank you for helping me out," the minister replied good-naturedly.

"Then it's all up with me," said Parsons. "I'm no philosopher. All I know is that I was born with a heart to feel, and a head that has learned how to put two and two together. If these can't help me, I'm afraid nothing can. I think I will say good-by now," he ended abruptly.

"What's your hurry?" The young man made a hasty excuse. "Well, good-by, then. We shall expect to hear from you."

Henry Parsons walked back to the hotel perplexed and sick at heart. He seemed destined to leave his old home with all his dearest associations destroyed. He hardly knew what it was he wanted, or felt he had a right to expect, from his old friend; but he was painfully aware of coming away from the rectory more empty of hope and good resolve than before.

There is generally less surprise in such revelations of character than we are willing to admit. Some little seed of distrust or discontent has found place in the heart before it germinates and grows into the tree of baleful knowledge. When he was younger, Parsons had not the experience to read correctly the rector's character. He knew him only as an accomplished scholar and intelligent guide in the study of classical literature. As he grew in years he began to take disappointed notice of many things, — the

disposition to speculate on grave questions, without apparent need to solve them, the careless tone employed in the discussion of serious problems, the absence of any burdensome sense of responsibility in the practical duties of his position. One of the first tests of youthful character comes with the loss of faith in some ideal of elderly wisdom and goodness. Few young men escape that period of introspective doubt which questions the worth of those supports to conscience and belief a later age knows it cannot dispense with. But Parsons's nature was not of the kind that loves to linger in the slough of callow scepticism. He was too just and practical for that. Though it was impossible for him to escape recognition of the difficult side of life, he hated cynicism, and all of those spiritually degrading notions which make up the social philosophy of many of the present generation; hated them the more that he saw at times the possibility of falling into them, if circumstances were only sufficiently propitious, as, he scornfully reflected to himself, they had seemed to be since morning. What a contrast between his mood now and then. A few hours ago, life had looked as easy as it was beautiful and inspiring. Now a black tempest raged in his soul. He had meant to leave Litchfield with only tender and inspiring memories filling his heart, and lighting the way into the untried future before him; but he was destined instead to go away with every ideal shattered, an intolerable load of pain and bruised affection weighing him to the earth.

The minister, all unconscious of the effect he had

produced, and unaware there was need that he should produce one effect more than another, re-entered the house, going into the sitting-room, where Bertha was anxiously awaiting him.

"O papa! what made you let him go?" she cried, as he entered the room.

"Let him go?" he repeated, in surprise.

"I am sure there has been some trouble," she continued, in a distressed tone.

"Oh, has there?" shrewdly abating his surprise in anticipation of results.

"Then he has told you all about it? Do tell me, papa; has she refused him?" The minister now let his surprise appear in full.

"Come, come, this is getting interesting. Who is she?"

"Why, Maggie Dean, of course."

"Maggie Dean!" he exclaimed, with a slight frown, "do you mean that Henry Parsons is interested in your friend Maggie?"

"Why, papa, didn't you know? They have been lovers ever since they were children."

"And yet she has refused him, you say?" An air of furtive embarrassment hung over the rector during the discussion of this topic.

"No, it was you who said that," his daughter corrected.

"I?" in a helpless tone.

"Oh, dear," she laughed, "neither of us said it; only I am almost sure she has, and that is the reason why he is going off in this way."

"Your friend must be rather ambitious, to refuse a man like Henry Parsons."

"But, papa, I don't think she really meant it." The minister felt it his duty to look very severe here.

"Do you mean that Maggie is a coquette?"

"Oh, no, papa," was the quick reply. "Maggie is the best girl in the world, and I am sure she likes him, only he is so impatient; and Maggie — well, I don't believe she knows her own mind yet. Of course she isn't obliged to marry him."

"Perhaps not; but a girl like Maggie is hardly in a position to be over-nice in such matters."

"I don't understand, papa," his daughter said wonderingly.

"I mean she belongs to a class inferior to that which Parsons would raise her to. Maggie is not exactly one of your own circle, you must remember. She is not likely to get a better chance than Parsons can offer her. I hope my own daughter will behave more wisely when her turn comes." A faint shadow of doubt crept over Bertha's face as she listened to this. She did not always understand her father.

"I don't mean to have any turn," she answered smilingly, dismissing unpleasant thoughts. "I mean to stay and take care of you." He kissed and thanked her, but it would nowise suit him to have his daughter end her days in unsought spinsterhood. Bertha, reflecting on words of his, hesitatingly spoke again.

"It isn't Maggie's fault if she does belong to a different" — she paused a moment in troubled reflection. — "What class is ours?" she asked abruptly.

"That in which culture and social breeding are the passports to whatever privileges it seeks," was the confident reply. She pondered this a moment.

"That is very nice," she murmured; then, looking up at him again, "Yet we visit people who are neither refined nor cultivated. There is Mrs. Briggs: she has nothing but money."

"Money is a qualification we have to put up with when others are missing. We cannot always control these things as we would like."

"And when one has neither money nor the opportunity for culture," she began, but suddenly changed her course. "Do you think it is right," turning another troubled look on her father, "dividing people in that way?"

"I didn't divide them," he replied. "Neither did I separate the vertebrates from the articulates. I only know that the classification exists, and that it is a convenient one. I dare say the trilobite thinks its jointed structure as good as a backbone, but we who are so fortunate as to have a spinal column can't help thinking otherwise." Bertha laughed. She thought her father very clever.

"Only it seems different with people," she urged. "Of course we know that the trilobite doesn't really care whether it has a backbone or not," she continued artlessly; "but it seems very unjust when a young man like Henry Parsons has to take a lower place than Charles Foster, for example," the son of Judge Foster, who had led a life of dissipation from early youth. "To look at them, one would say it was

Henry Parsons who had been well born and had all the advantages."

"Yes, my dear, I don't deny that; and Henry will win all the honors, you may be sure. In a republic these things settle themselves. Every man reaches his right level sooner or later." With this comfortable disposal of the problem into everybody's keeping, the rector seated himself in a large easy-chair.

"But I can't help wanting to hurry things a little. There's Maggie, now, papa; her father is a working-man, but there isn't a brighter girl in town than Maggie. I love her so much."

"Maggie loves herself a good deal too, doesn't she?" the minister inquired, in a peculiar tone. Neither he nor Bertha had yet heard of last night's accident.

"O papa! I don't think Maggie is vain at all. You should hear her sometimes in one of her blue spells. She abuses herself without mercy."

"That's only another form of vanity, my dear. Why does your friend abuse herself?"

"Oh, because she is impulsive, and has a quick temper, and wants things she can't have."

"You mean she is discontented and a bit selfish."

"Oh, no, papa, I don't think Maggie means to be selfish."

"None of us mean to be selfish, my dear; we only permit ourselves to be so," stretching out his feet, and placing them on a cushioned ottoman.

"And I don't know as I blame her if she is discontented a little. I should be discontented too if I had

to live as she does. Her home is so plain and unattractive."

"Then, why doesn't she try to make it more attractive?"

"Well, Maggie doesn't like fancy-work. She thinks it is silly. I don't believe Mrs. Dean would like the house filled up with tidies and lambrequins. And you know, papa, you say we have too many."

"That's because they are always falling out of place," adjusting the square of embroidered lace on the arm of his chair. "It's false economy when there are more tidies than there are pins to fasten them to something."

Bertha laughed again. "What odd things you say, papa. You are just like Maggie. When I corner her, she makes one of her absurd speeches, and I laugh and forget my point." The rector received this with a flattered smile. "Then, she is so quick; she sees through everything." A slight motive of defence prompted this praise of her friend, Bertha having a dim feeling that her father did not like Maggie as well as he once did. He had not paid her so much attention of late.

"That is a dangerous quality in any young woman," said the minister, rising from his chair. "I feel safer with people who have an eye for surfaces." He moved towards his study.

"You needn't think you can escape that way, papa," his daughter said, placing her arm through his, and walking with him across the room. "It's easy enough seeing through you anyway; you are

the best and kindest man in the world, though you like to cover it up and pretend you are so cool and philosophical."

"Why, I shall think I am your favorite father if you keep on praising me so."

"Yes, that is it," she said, laughing, and kissing him. "You are my favorite father."

He went into his study, and closed the door. Bertha stood reflecting on the outside a moment. She wanted to go to her friend at once, but doubted if she ought to, and went reluctantly back to her sewing.

The hours that still remained after he left the rectory until train-time seemed of interminable length to Henry Parsons, who spent them in restless roaming about the streets. When evening came, and the darkness covered him, he found himself, before he was aware, on the bridge in sight of the house he had left in such hot anger that morning. He had no intention of seeking Maggie by open or accidental means, but it was impossible to deny himself a last look at the place. He had familiar acquaintance with every object on the roadside, and recognized all the old landmarks even in the darkness. In one place was a broken rail in the fence which used to afford passage-way to Maggie and him from the street to the pastures beyond. Over yonder was the big elm where they had often stopped to rest in the shade and eat the remains of their school lunch. Farther on was the old saw-mill, with the tall chimney and remnants of broken machinery, which had excited his

mingled awe and curiosity, when a boy, as the possible home of ghosts; which he had not been so afraid of, however, but that he had sought refuge there from the home which contained a living apparition he dreaded still more.

Down the road past the Deans' stretched a wide extent of field and meadow which might have been his, since it had once belonged to his father, but whose value had been long ago squandered, and had now fallen to a stranger's use. Henry Parsons did not regret the rich harvest of grain, but the deeper loss this one stood for had never filled him with more bitter pain than he felt to-night; going mechanically on his way, he stood in front of the little cottage where he was born. It had long since ceased to be habitable, and was now used as a storing-house by one of the neighboring farmers. An untidy litter of old boxes and empty barrels gave the place a forlorn and deserted look. Parsons stood there, his head bent forward on his arms above the board fence, and gave himself up to despairful thoughts. How could he ever hope to escape the effects of such a blot as this? It was not a mere social stigma that rested on him, but a moral blight. He had tainted blood in his veins. He had not inherited his father's disgusting appetite, but the animalism of that lazy, self-indulgent nature had descended to the son, taking another form. Brute instincts were at work within him, which led him to as wild excesses of feeling and passion as his father had yielded to on a more sensuous plane. He had gone to Maggie that morning

with a fiery tempest raging in his breast, pouring out all his anger and the low, mean feelings at work within him, unmindful of the danger she had escaped, and while she was still weak and half ill from the shock she had received. Where he should have shown himself strong and patient, he had behaved like a vicious fool; where the chance had been offered to stand beside and protect her against the malicious tongues now wagging against her, he had wantonly abused and thrown it away in order to give play to his emotions of jealousy and anger. But what was to be expected of a man of such coarse moral fibre as his? It was only the rougher sort of virtue he was capable of. Because he did not lie and steal he had fallen into the way of thinking himself a fine fellow, but there was nothing really fine about him. He was essentially coarse and common. No man — no gentleman, he said to himself, with stinging self-scorn — would have acted as he did.

For an hour he stood there in the darkness and let the waves of remorseful shame and despair sweep over him. On his return to the village he paused on the bridge to look back. The lamp was lighted in the Deans' sitting-room, and shone through the open door. He could see Mrs. Dean stepping briskly about, and a moment after his heart gave a great leap as Maggie herself came and stood in the doorway, her slim figure outlining itself in clear silhouette against the lighted background. Could it be possible she was thinking of him, perhaps expecting and hoping his return? The next moment he would have acted

on the impulse this wild, sweet thought inspired, but she turned back again and closed the door behind her, shutting herself from sight. He forced himself to turn and go on his way. As he did so he saw a woman's figure at the opposite end of the bridge. The hour was late and the place lonely, and he felt the instinctive dread with which she drew closer to the bridge's rail on her side of the road. He was walking quietly on, looking straight before him, when he became aware that the woman had paused and was looking back at him. At the same time a voice spoke.

"Is that Henry Parsons?" and he knew it was Helen Dean. He quickly drew near.

"You have been to the house?" she said. He looked at her in surprise. Then she did not know of the morning's visit. Maggie had said nothing about it. What did that bode for him — good, or ill? He could not tell.

"I was there this morning," he said, at length. Then, after another pause, "I am going away to-night."

"Going away — to-night?" she repeated, in surprise. "I thought you were not going until next week." He kept silent. "What is the matter?" she went on, in a more urgent tone. "Has anything happened?"

"Death and damnation have happened." He spoke with none of that hot-headed emphasis which words like these might indicate, but with despairful intensity. His listener shrank a little away from him.

"Hush. What do you mean — that you and Maggie have quarrelled?" She recalled as she spoke her sister's red and swollen eyelids at the dinner table. Maggie had refused to eat anything and had gone to her room, while her family, without saying much to each other, had accounted for her behavior on the ground of nervousness from the accident.

"Yes, we have quarrelled," he made weary answer. "She has sent me away. She was very angry with me, but justifiably so. I behaved like a fool. I was mad with pain and jealousy, and when I thought of her being with that man, and that she cared more for him than for me, it made me wild."

"Is it Sidney Gale you are talking about?" Helen asked, in a grave tone.

"He is a miserable coward," Parsons burst out, with a return of the morning's fury, "a smirking dandy, who has no more sense of honor than his hatband, who openly boasts of every smile and look he receives from a woman."

These words aroused a new fear in his listener. "What do you mean?" she asked, rather sharply. "Maggie has been foolish, but she has done no real harm."

"Do you think I don't know that?" he replied, "but he," striking his hand on the wooden railing at his side, and with a passionate tremor in his voice, "I hate him."

"Hush, do not be so violent. Maggie does not care for Sidney Gale."

"Are you sure of that?" he cried. Hope again

sprang up in his heart. This accidental meeting was to lead to the end of all his troubles, perhaps. Helen would desire a reconcilement between Maggie and himself, and would herself become the arbiter of peace. But Helen offered to do nothing of the kind. When she had questioned him and learned what had occurred, she gave him some sisterly advice, earnestly upholding his resolve to go away, which now showed signs of wavering, and counselling patience.

"You are both young yet. Maggie does not know her own mind, but I am sure you will gain nothing by staying. It will be much better for you to go away."

His disappointment was keen and nearly unmanned him. "It is like death," he said, with a sob in his voice, "to go away like this, not to see her again. Look at me," he pleaded; "I have no one but her; I am absolutely alone in the world."

Helen waited a moment in pitying silence before she spoke. "There are many lonely people in the world," she said. "There is only one thought that helps me, when I think of the troubles people must bear, and that is that they *can* bear them. No trial is put on us that we cannot support if we will. Some people are so weak and selfish they will bear no form of suffering with patience. You would not choose to be like them. You would choose, I am sure, to rank with the strong souls, who can submit to suffer if they must."

The tall figure, standing with bent head before her, heaved a profound sigh. The stormy elements within

were slowly settling into quiet. She said much more to him, words to the same effect, of wise and earnest counsel, that rebuked selfish passion and shamed him out of his childishness. He left her feeling that the world was not quite so empty of human worth as he had believed it to be a few hours before, and carrying with him a sense of sisterly trust and sympathy that warmed his heart. Helen was his friend, the loyal supporter of his wishes about Maggie. She had promised to write to him. He should hear about Maggie and know what she was doing. The light that had shone through all his life was not to be utterly extinguished, but would still glimmer feebly in the distance. He could not feel wholly desolate and bereft of hope. In this tempered though still grief-stricken frame of mind he boarded the midnight train and was borne westward.

Maggie, lying restless and awake on her pillow, heard it, listening until the last faint, rumbling sound died away, not knowing its coming or going had aught to do with her. The next day she received a short letter, which read as follows: —

"DEAR MAGGIE — For that is what I shall always call you in my heart. I behaved like a brute this morning. Nothing can excuse those last words I said. I shall never forgive myself for them, but I want you to know how thoroughly ashamed of them I am, and that I would give worlds to recall them. I am going away to-night.

"HENRY PARSONS."

CHAPTER X.

OF HIS DAY AND GENERATION.

THE surgeon, to whose office Sidney Gale was carried after the accident, examined his hurt arm with a grave countenance, and informed him that it was a case of compound fracture. The broken limb was packed in plaster and the owner compelled to wear it in a sling several weeks. Gale's principal feeling over the accident was one of chagrin. He cared less for the broken arm than for the necessity which compelled him, in the care of it, to make a walking advertisement of himself every time he went into the street. He would have preferred a broken leg, which would have kept him safely housed from observation until it was well, and people had had time to forget the cause. He said to himself that he had paid pretty dearly for his fun — that a broken arm was no joke under the best of circumstances, and that it became a bore and a nuisance when it had to be accepted as the climacteric event in a series of small purposeless actions, which, though he bore himself with the same air of smiling bravado as before, began to irk and chafe him in the remembrance, besides having the effect to dampen a little the feeling of popular good will in which he had stood. He won sufficient sympathy, however, to meet the occasion's demands,

though it could not repress the disposition to chaff and tease on the part of his younger acquaintances. Gale bore this with less than his usual good nature, and seemed at times in danger of losing his fine temper.

He paid regular visits to the doctor's office, where he was forced to listen to a good deal of elderly advice and wisdom that he felt no use for, until he came to feel as impatient of the company of old men as Hamlet, and, like him, set his youthful smartness to work to avenge his boredom. Dr. Green was the oldest practitioner in town, who had long since reached the age of spectacled dulness. There were many who did not hesitate to say that he was breaking down, and who had transferred their patronage to younger and more enterprising members of the profession. Gale himself perhaps would have taken his broken arm elsewhere had he been in a condition to choose for himself at the time of the accident, not because he distrusted the hands into which he had fallen, but from an instinctive dislike youth feels to close contact with the age of stoop-shouldered wisdom, gone a little beyond the ripening period and sinking into decay. But Sidney Gale was less impatient with his physician than with Nature, who is never in a hurry. That ancient dame was neither to be placated by compliment, nor disturbed by his gibes and sarcasms. He made up for his failure here by amusing himself with the doctor, turning the remarks of that sober gentleman into such whimsical use that the bewildered originator no longer recognized them.

He felt himself badly treated when, on one of these professional visits a month after the accident, he was told he must wear his arm in a sling a fortnight longer, and gave vent to an impatient protest. The doctor tried to pacify him and explain the situation.

"It's the right arm, you see," he said, in his deliberate tone, "and we mustn't be in a hurry. It takes time for the fibres of a broken bone to knit themselves together; it takes time."

"I thought it was the right arm," the owner of it replied. "It generally is the right arm, isn't it, doctor?"

The latter looked at him over his spectacles, winking slowly to take in the full measure of this difficult question.

"Well, I don't know about that," he said, at last. "I don't remember just what the books do say on that point. But I think not," he added, in a hopeful tone, as if the knowledge of a broken opposite member in some one else might hasten the recovery of his patient. "There is the young lady who was with you in the carriage. It was her left wrist that was sprained, was it not?"

"Yes, I believe that's so," Sidney replied reflectively, as if it was with difficulty he could recall the exact nature of this other case; "but young ladies are apt to be contrary, Miss Dean in particular, I fancy. If it is the custom to sprain the right wrist, that would be sufficient reason in her mind for selecting the left." He spoke with a little irritation here, which his listener could not understand. The doctor

had taken off his spectacles and was wiping them with his handkerchief, while he looked with near-sighted doubt at his companion. He belonged to the generation that was passing away, and the young man of the period was a puzzle to him. His easy manners and careless speech, sharpened with the cunning of youthful precocity and tinged with daring cynicism, was unlike anything he remembered in his own sober, hard-working youth; and there were moments when he doubted the superior usefulness to the world of the new species. He had a suspicion that the young man sitting before him, with an ironical accent and one leg dangling over the arm of his chair, was amusing himself at his betters' expense, though, in view of the innocency of his own intention, this view was difficult to retain. If it were true, he need not give his opponent the advantage of letting him know he perceived it. A good way to escape injury in this world is to keep ignorant of any one's desire to hurt you. The doctor only murmured a half-articulate "Ah!" replacing his spectacles and saying he did not know the young lady very well.

"Then, you know her as well as those who know her better, since those who know her best know her least, in respect that they have yet to learn as much as those who know nothing at all. Sounds like Touchstone, doesn't it?" smiling, and swinging his leg.

"Touchstone?" the other repeated, in an uncertain tone.

"Historical character who lived in the sixteenth

century, in a place called the Forest of Arden, though he wasn't exactly in the timber line either."

"One of Shakspeare's characters, I suppose."

"Yes, there's something about him in Shakspeare. Touchstone lived by his wits. A man could in those days," with an aggrieved accent, "though he said he should never be fully aware of his until he had broken his shins against them. I hope he liked it better than I do my broken arm."

"You don't feel Touchstone's need of a sharpened intellect, perhaps." The slower intelligence of the older man was beginning to catch a faint spark from the crackling flame of the younger's.

"Oh, I don't know," was the calm reply. "Touchstone wasn't such a modest fellow either. 'We that have good wits have much to answer for,' he used to say. And really I mustn't waste any more time here," swinging his leg into position, and rising suddenly to his feet. "There's another reason why Miss Dean might have chosen the left wrist," lingering near the door, and reverting to a subject that did not easily leave his mind. "She doesn't have to write all day in an office, and, having no especial use for her right hand, could well afford not to injure it." Again the venerable doctor looked at his patient over his spectacles in blinking doubt as to the exact nature of this remark.

"I don't know what my uncle will say when he learns that I've got to keep my arm in this confounded sling two weeks longer. I mean nothing against the sling, you know; it's a very good sling:

but he's pressed for help, and didn't more than half like my breaking my arm anyway. Now, my aunt feels differently about it. I really think I have done her a favor by giving her a chance to nurse and pet me a little more than my natural graces call for when I'm well. I hate to tell my uncle, though, how long I've got to keep this thing up," casting a discontented look down at his bandaged arm.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you," said the doctor, "but, you see, a compound fracture of that kind" —

"Oh, I'm as glad as you are that it's a compound fracture," with gratified emphasis on the adjective. "You mustn't think I don't understand the interest a good patient ought to feel in such a case. I mean to help you make the most of it; still, I shall be glad when I get this plaster thing off my arm."

"You don't seem to get used to it," the doctor said sympathetically.

"Oh, yes, I do; that's what frightens me. By George, I feel like Mary Anderson when she is turning back into Galatea — the stone woman, you know. Good-by, doctor; see you later," and he swung himself airily out of the room.

Sidney Gale was quite honest in his resolution to let the accident teach him a lesson. It was high time he stopped his useless admiration for Maggie Dean, and the sooner that little affair was dropped the better. He still thought her the brightest girl in town, but that made no difference. He meant to marry his cousin, Laura Danvers; and since the narrow code of village ethics ordained that when a

young man meant to marry one young woman he should not take another out to drive without incurring the risk of an overturned carriage and a broken arm, he must submit to the ruling. He would let Maggie entirely alone in the future, and put an end to the chattering gossip that had been busy with their names the past few weeks, which, he began to fear, might injure his hopes in another quarter. This resolution was the more easily reached that he had a strong suspicion Maggie meant to let him alone. Banishing useless regrets, he set himself steadily to the task of thinking only of his cousin. To strengthen this purpose, he got out all her photographs, taken at intervals from the age of babyhood to the present, and arranged them about his room. Gale was one of those young men on whom girls' photographs rain down like manna in the wilderness. They covered the mantel and formed a frame around the mirror, while the newest and prettiest ones did ornamental service on small easels and brackets. All these were religiously banished now, to make room for his cousin's. Just at present, however, Gale got but slight comfort from the likenesses of his young relative, perhaps because he derived so little from the original.

Laura Danvers had been a distant spectator of the accident. Returning home, she went directly to her mother's room. Her face was flushed, and she looked both angry and humiliated. Mrs. Danvers was making leisurely preparations for bed, having removed the square of lace she wore instead of a cap, and

revealing the thinly covered piece of scalp it concealed.

"Mother, can I go away to school this fall?" she asked, the moment she entered the room. Her mother turned from the tall dressing bureau and looked at her in surprise.

"Why, Laura, what put that into your head? I didn't know you had got back. I didn't hear you come in. Were there many out to prayer-meeting?"

"Say that I can go, mother," her daughter urged, in an imploring tone. "I must go. I can't stay here any longer." There was a distressed catch in her voice at the end, which threatened to get the mastery soon.

"Can't stay here!" her mother repeated, still more surprised. "How strangely you talk, Laura! What would your cousin Sidney say?"

"I don't care what he says." Her breast heaved, and the hot tears rose. "He has no right to say anything. He is nothing to me. He"— Here the proud girl broke down. Her mother, alarmed and more bewildered than before, tried to quiet her, and at last succeeded in extracting piecemeal the story of the evening's accident. She listened with a face more puzzled than disturbed, while she tried to soothe and reason with her excited daughter.

"There, there, Laura, I am ashamed of you," she said at last; "I dare say, Sidney can explain everything. The worst thing a girl can do is to show a young man she is jealous. You should have more

pride, and I don't believe there is any cause. A nice, pretty girl I thought her the night she was here."

"I know she is pretty. I never denied it," the other said, drying her eyes with a shamefaced air. "May I go away to school, mother?"

"Nonsense, Laura! It's two months yet before school-time. You'll forget all about it by that time. Did you say Sidney had broken his arm? How selfish we are to be thinking of anything else! Poor boy! We must give him a room here and take care of him. I wonder if your father has heard of it. I'll send John to inquire."

"Mother!" the girl exclaimed, in anguished entreaty. "Don't have him come here," but Mrs. Danvers had already stepped into the hall, and, calling to a maid below, delivered her message.

"Laura, I am surprised at you; your cousin Sidney too," she said reprovingly, as she re-entered the room.

"Then, may I go and make that visit to Eva Stearns? You know you promised." The reminder that school would not open for two months had served as a decided check to a purpose which must be put into instant execution, to have any moral effect.

"Well, well, we'll talk of that to-morrow; but it's very selfish in you, Laura, to want to go away now just when your cousin is hurt and ought to have some one to entertain and take care of him. There, go to your room," as the girl opened her lips to speak, "and bathe your eyes. I must get Sidney's room ready in case your father brings him home.

Good-night!" She bent down and kissed her daughter, repeated her instructions, and with a slow, waddling gait, left the room.

Laura felt that she was most unsympathetically treated, but, as the first angry emotion passed and she grew more quiet, she was rather relieved than otherwise that her mother had not taken things more seriously.

Absorbed in the exercise of those motherly devices which the presence in the house of her favorite nephew, sick and with a broken arm, inspired, Mrs. Danvers forgot all about the outburst of jealous feeling she had witnessed. She was one of those easy, kindly disposed souls whose own nature has never been stirred beneath the surface, and who pass through life quite unaware of the emotive depths in those about them. Her knowledge of her daughter was comprised in the belief that Laura was a good girl, rather shy and distant in her manners, not so social as some of her mates, but sensible and to be trusted. There had been a tacit understanding in the household for years that Laura and her cousin Sidney were to be married some day. Mrs. Danvers's life had flowed in such an undisturbed channel that doubt of any possible check or disturbance in the young people's relations never crossed her mind. Such a match would be most suitable; she and her husband had been long agreed on this point, and the friendly disposition of the two principals towards each other seemed sufficiently assured. Laura was an obedient daughter. Her cousin Sidney was a young

man who understood his own interests and had always preserved a filial attitude towards his adopted parents. Nothing seemed to stand in the way of the peaceful consummation of the hopes clustering round this young couple. If Mrs. Danvers had been convinced that "the children," as she called them, did not like each other, she would have regretfully admitted they had better not marry; but she would never have ceased to wonder why mere liking in such matters cannot be controlled by other reasonable considerations of prudence and general desirability.

Mr. Danvers had the average American business man's pre-occupation in the work of money-getting combined with entire trust in his wife's ability to manage the concerns of the family. He made liberal provision for the household, and left his daughter to her mother's care and guidance. He had placed his nephew in a good position, and given him to understand that he meant to do well by him. So far the latter had not disappointed him. Sidney had proved a quick and competent assistant, though not quite so ambitious as his uncle. He stood rather above most of the young men of the village, in point of morals and intelligence. Mr. Danvers would not be too hard on a young man in respect to the first, though the vulgar indulgences of some of his young acquaintances offended both his taste and his judgment. A man had little excuse, he thought, for not leading a decent, prosperous life. He governed his own conduct with a few set principles, which he regarded as so many paying investments in a life of industrious

ease and accumulation. Untroubled with moods or subtle questionings of any kind, owning a conscience indeed, but which might rather be described as a slice of shrewd judgment applied to the moral side of things, Mr. Danvers stood first in the business community where he lived. He was a good husband and father, as the phrase goes, leading a life of unbroken surface contentment with the wife who never opposed him, and loving his daughter of course, conscious that she was of a kind that did him credit, but having no more real understanding of her, or interest in the motives and ideas of her growing youth, than of the needs of the inhabitants of some foreign planet. If any doubt had occurred to him about the mutual fitness of Laura and her cousin to marry, he would have brushed it aside as easily as a fly from his horse's ear. If his nephew had been an ill-natured or dissipated fellow, likely to make a wife trouble, he would have opposed the marriage; but he was just the opposite. Sidney would make a kind husband, which was what a woman wanted, and a desirable son-in-law, helping to preserve the pre-eminence of the leather trade in Litchfield.

Laura Danvers was slowly growing into the knowledge of the mental aloofness in which she stood towards her parents. They loved her, she knew, and indulged all her wishes, but she often felt lonely in their society. Without brothers and sisters, she had led a companionless life. She cared more for her cousin than for any living being. That is not to say, however, that she might not sometime care for some-

body else much more. It is an unusual thing when the entire sum and quality of a woman's affections receive their final test at nineteen. Laura Danvers loved her cousin partly from the natural effects of propinquity, and partly from the necessity of loving that which is lovable. Sidney had come into the family when both were young enough to form an unrestrained friendship for each other. They had lived together as brother and sister; but as they grew older, and the knowledge came to them of their elders' expectations, a fine veil dropped between them, and the old free intercourse came to an end. They seldom saw each other alone, and avoided each other's society, at the same time that Gale began to bestow certain attentions and outward civilities on his cousin, which seemed to her only to create a further distance between them. Laura felt herself wronged, and in an unfair position, but would not have known how to extricate herself from it even had she been sure she wished it. In spite of her dissatisfaction with her cousin and slight distrust of him, the sense of ownership was still active. Hers was the first claim, one he tacitly admitted, but the obligation of a friend to be true to us is a poor substitute for truth itself. Laura felt that her chances to win her cousin's favor would have been strengthened by nothing so much as an opportunity to break through the intangible bond that united them, and place herself in the same independent position towards him that other young women held. But the most difficult obstacle in the way of the cousins' better acquaint-

ance was disparity of temperament. Sidney Gale's frank, easy nature, engaging manners, and ready wit, were a complete contrast to Laura's silent and reflective disposition. She often felt her seriousness to be a drag on her power of entertaining, and wished she had the art other girls possessed, of meeting her cousin on his own ground, replying to his gay nonsense in kind, and parrying his comic speeches with neat little sarcasms and repartees of her own. For, kind and studiously polite as he always was to her, the despondent conviction never left her that she could do little to interest and amuse him, and Sidney liked to be amused. He sought the society of lively people as instinctively as the mote floats towards the sunbeam. He was always the originator and main actor in whatever piece of fun was going on at the various social entertainments they attended together. When he and Maggie Dean came together it was like the play of two separate bits of flame which draw near and unite a moment, then dart away in opposite directions, only to reach out with coquettish grace to meet and touch again.

Laura Danvers could have borne to see her cousin laughing and talking with Maggie Dean, and openly seeking her society, though the sight did not please her; but what she justly felt she could not forgive was the secret acquaintance they had been cultivating in the afternoon walks on Taylor Street. It was natural, perhaps, that she should bring the main weight of her displeasure to bear on Maggie. A sentiment of repugnance and distrust had now risen against

her classmate. She had never permitted herself to call Maggie vain or selfish, but she did not hesitate now to pronounce her vulgar; an epithet that would have bitten into Maggie's sensitive pride more deeply still. The feeling of class distinction, which Laura Danvers had held from childhood, began to strengthen and formed an active element in her feelings at this time. The point at which members of society in a town like Litchfield draw the line between those privileged to win its favors and unprivileged losers is a curious and shifting one. Laura Danvers had never attempted to settle this point, but she now said to herself that, though Maggie Dean might be very bright and entertaining, she had shown very plainly the commonness of her origin and breeding in her relations with her cousin Sidney. What better could be expected of the daughter of a railroad mechanic than that she should improve every opportunity to push her way into a rank above that in which she was born? Laura Danvers did not stop to inquire into the exact nature of a social prestige belonging to a wholesale dealer in leather; she only knew that her own position was one of acknowledged advantage and superiority. Her father had attained wealth and influence, their house was the centre of what was known as the best society. Circumstances of this kind have their natural effect in determining the standards of conduct among those who profit by them, and Laura Danvers believed it impossible that she, trained to a careful observance of social rules and conventions, could ever have behaved

as Maggie Dean had done. Perhaps she was right.

She blamed her cousin less than she did Maggie, not only because of feminine jealousy, but because he was a man. Young men could do things that were not permitted to young women. This was a part of the social instruction she had received all her life, and had not yet learned to question. If her cousin Sidney chose to amuse himself in such a way, she might deplore his taste, but would not presume to sit in any higher judgment. Only now, when his folly had run to the extent of openly compromising her, involving her in the same ridiculous exposure as himself, her duty was to resent and punish such conduct. Her mother might invite Sidney to the house, and nurse and pet him as much as she liked; the daughter had thoroughly resolved not to help her. She had been foiled in her wish to leave home, by a letter from the friend she meant to visit, written on the eve of the latter's departure for the East; but she had not given up the project of going away to school, winning at last a reluctant consent from her parents.

The gist of their conclusion in this matter was that, as the children were too young to marry yet, Laura might as well follow her wish and see a little more of the world, as much as was to be obtained in a year's course in a fashionable seminary, with expensive tuition fees, each pupil to furnish her own fork and spoon. Though there were still several weeks before her departure, Laura began immediate preparations for the new life awaiting her. The dressmaker and

plain seamstress were called in, and the work of a new wardrobe begun, second in variety and interest only to that of a bride's. In further preparation, of a different order, and to keep herself out of her cousin's way, still lounging about the house with his arm in a sling, Laura reviewed her old text-books, and began a course in German with Miss Graham.

Sidney Gale opened his eyes in puzzled astonishment when he learned of his cousin's project, then set himself to watch the proceedings going on about him with mingled chagrin and amusement. At first, he believed it to be only a whim, and that, when the time came for her to go, Laura would find some excuse for remaining at home. But, aside from her main purpose to get away from home, Laura had a young woman's longing to try the unknown. She really wanted to go away, to surround herself with new scenes and people, to test and measure herself with new standards and ideas. It gratified her, without causing her to relent, that her cousin was so manifestly perplexed, and even a little disturbed, over her conduct at this time. She had meant to punish him, and, for the first time in their acquaintance, she was enjoying the taste of power. Hitherto she had studied only to please him, but we must have some power to displease if we would make an effective impression of ourselves on others.

"I don't see what you are going away to school for," he said to her one day, in a complaining tone. "I should think once graduating was enough."

"For some girls, perhaps," was her reply, "but

when a young woman has opportunity for something better she ought to improve it. I have always wanted to take a finishing course."

"Oh, it's to be a finishing course. Now, I never should have known but that you were finished already. I judged you by myself, I suppose. I've been feeling pretty well finished for some time," with a sentimental look.

"I should think you would," with a glance at his injured arm, relieved of the plaster now, and worn in a silk bandage.

"I didn't mean that," he explained. "I — I meant it was you — who had finished me."

An angry red burned in the girl's cheeks. "I wish you wouldn't make silly speeches to me," she cried, "especially when" —

"When what?" he calmly inquired, as she paused abruptly.

"When they're not true," she impetuously ended. Poor girl! If she had been less honest she would have turned her sentence in another direction and avoided the self-betrayal it involved; but that was her difficulty with this nimble-witted cousin. He was always, whether intentionally or not she did not know, taking her off her guard, exposing her deepest feelings in a manner that would have been cruel had it not seemed so heedless, and all the time, she felt, curiously watching her.

"I didn't know I wasn't speaking the truth," he replied, not looking at her, idly picking up a card from the table near by, and dropping it again.

He was not in the mood for very ardent love-making. "If you think I wasn't utterly done up and laid on a shelf when I heard you were going away, you know nothing about the feelings of a man and a — a cousin."

The last word touched her, and she replied coldly, "Cousins are not required to have very strong feelings, fortunately."

"They should reserve them for somebody's else cousin, you mean? That's easily done. I am cousin to my cousin Blanche in Chicago, and you are the cousin of that grown-up nephew of my aunt's who was visiting here last spring. I can think of you in that light, if you prefer. If you condemn me to take that roundabout road, I suppose I must submit, even though some one else does improve the opportunity to step across lots and get in ahead. The roundabout journey has this advantage, though, that it keeps us longer on the way."

This was not exactly what he meant to say, and was for Sidney Gale quite infelicitous. It seemed to point very boldly to his leisurely methods of wooing, and he shot a quick, apprehensive look towards his companion to see if she resented it. But she seemed to have only half listened and to be lost in her own thoughts. Gale had occasion to reflect, as he had before, on the increased susceptibility to boredom a fellow feels when talking to a woman who never seems to care about his odd and witty speeches. He recalled the answering sparkle and ripple of fun that ran over Maggie Dean's face when he talked to

her, giving vent to that spirit of impish drollery that served as his familiar *dæmon*. It gave him a sensation of creeping paralysis to think of spending his life in the company of a woman who never laughed at her husband's jokes. To change the subject, he took up a photograph, a new one his cousin had lately sat for, and asked if she were not going to give one to him.

"They're all promised," she replied carelessly.

"That's too bad," he said. "I wanted to complete my list. Do you know I have all the pictures you have given me hung up in my room?" in an ingratiating tone. "There are thirteen."

"I know you have a great many photographs," she said, with a satirical accent.

"There isn't another girl's picture among them," he quickly replied.

"Miss Dean doesn't photograph well, I suppose."

This remark was followed by a portentous silence. It was spoken without forethought and in direct opposition to every previous wish and resolve of the speaker. An evil impulse had seized her, and before she could banish it the words had dropped from her lips. Now they were spoken, she felt profoundly humiliated and astonished at herself. She had never meant to drop to that level. It is hard to account for the contradictory impulses that sway us, where the hasty, inadvertent speech we never really meant stands as the measure of our sober feeling and conviction, bringing perhaps an honored friend's confidence in us to a sudden tragic close and slaying self-

respect at a blow. There is a streak of innate vulgarity in most of us, which years of refined association and high-minded endeavor cannot always keep out of sight. It appears here and there in small, unsightly touches that disfigure the soul's countenance as much as a physical blotch does the real one. Laura Danvers felt herself essentially vulgar and ignoble after the words she had just spoken, but in the first seizure of such a feeling we are less displeased with ourselves than with the luckless spectator of our mistake, and just now she blamed her cousin more than herself. As for Gale, he was chiefly amused. This was the first word that had ever been dropped in recognition of a subject that lay like a shadow between them; but, though his self-love was flattered, he was acute, if not generous enough, not to display it. When he spoke, it was apparently with the most open intention.

"Why should you be angry with me about that?" he asked innocently. "When a girl asks a fellow to take her to a friend's" — he stopped.

"I am not angry," she said, in a manner that disputed her words. "It is nothing to me whom you take driving." Then, with a little sting, "I didn't know gentlemen told of such things."

"They don't," he replied quickly, a swift revulsion of shame sweeping over him. "Besides, it's a lie. I asked her to ride. I don't know what harm there was in it."

"Nor I," she replied, with icy composure. Inwardly, she was hurt anew and deeply, but she mas-

tered her feelings, and the subject was dropped. Each would have been glad to dispense with the other's society; but neither chose to appear so, and they stood together in an embarrassed silence, broken by a fitful word now and then on indifferent topics, until Mrs. Danvers came in, and Laura found an excuse for leaving the room.

CHAPTER XI.

TWO WOMEN.

When Maggie learned that Henry Parsons had really gone, she was still too much under the influence of the exciting events of the past two days to be deeply affected by the news, other than as it increased the feeling of injury rankling within. Irritated over the smaller hurts she had received, she was not yet sensible of the real nature and extent of the larger injury. Self-love lay stricken in the dust; but honest affection, resting on sound respect and the associations of years, had yet to attain full knowledge of its loss.

Before this could come about, something was to occur of graver and more startling nature than anything that had yet befallen her, which was to complete the sum of Maggie's spoiled illusions. More than one little bubble of fancy had been destroyed during the past week, but now something was to happen which would pierce deeper than to a young girl's imaginary belief in things. So far, she had been only vexed and chagrined by the disappointing turn of certain events. Real unhappiness, Maggie had yet to learn.

There was no hint or warning in the air of what was to come. On the contrary, it was with a com-

paratively light heart that, at the close of the day on which she had received her letter, she made ready to pay a visit to the rectory. She had been in a state of restless discontent and depression all day, but now her spirits had suddenly lifted. The dark-tinged thoughts from which she had been suffering had spent their force, and seemed to have resolved themselves into the sunset glow that flooded the little village, sending long shafts of red light through the tree-tops and across the house-roofs as she walked along the street.

It is difficult to explain these sudden openings in the clouds that cover our mental horizon, except on the ground of the heart's natural right to happiness. Maggie did not try to account for her changed mood, only joyfully accepted it, following the first wish to which it gave rise, to see her friend. She and Bertha had not met for three days, a long period for a friendship like theirs to sustain. She wondered a little that Bertha had not been to see her and to inquire about the accident. Of course, she had heard of it, and would look grave over it. Maggie had made up her mind to be scolded a little, even to admit that she deserved it. But, though she might disapprove of her, she was sure that Bertha would never believe anything to her real injury. She was too noble to listen to evil-minded talk. "Besides, she loves me too well," Maggie said to herself, with happy confidence, as, with a light heart and a smile on her lips, she went on her way.

It was Mrs. Fay who first heard the news of the

accident, while on a round of parochial visits the day after. She knew nothing before of Maggie's acquaintance with Sidney Gale, the history of which was now repeated to her in numerous versions, which proved in themselves the large element of idle gossip entering therein. Mrs. Fay was, nevertheless, troubled more than she liked to admit.

Nobody really believed anything very bad of Maggie Dean. Both she and her family were too well known for that. Thomas Dean might be only a workingman, but native integrity and the quiet industry of a lifetime had gained him as secure a place in the esteem of his fellow-townsmen as the judge or the minister held. The rules of plain, upright living that governed the little household on the hill were well known and afforded a prized example in the community. There was no one who understood this better than Mrs. Fay, nor who stood ready to give evidence of this kind its due weight. But there is a long line of mischievous effects, arising from the mere disposition to relate our neighbors' mistakes, which is independent of any one's good or evil intention; and it was this conjectural talk and wisdom the rector's wife had learned most to dread.

Mrs. Fay was a natural leader, both in matters of opinion and of practical duty. Her clear and careful judgment had unravelled more than one tangled knot of social prejudice and mistrust. A strong sense of justice, combined with large womanly sympathy, led her to study all sides of a question and bestow help where it was most needed. When she did not do

this, it was because she was prevented by another will than her own. She was still in the early forties, but there was an expression of care and matured disappointment in her face that made her look older, so that many thought her her husband's senior.

Rector Fay had hinted to Parsons something about the flattering hopes his friends had entertained of him in his younger days. The woman he had married was one of these. Sarah Knowles had been governed in her choice by no worldly motive, only by that fervent admiration, quickly growing into love, which a young woman of earnest nature may feel for a man of brilliant powers, apparently consecrated to the highest objects. William Fay stood first in his class, and his early preaching in one of the large Eastern cities was marked by a graceful and fervid oratory that produced an immediate popular impression. To his pulpit ability he added qualifications of a lighter but useful order; a distinguished bearing, a dash of youthful spirits, and an amiable disposition. From the score of beautiful and accomplished women he might have selected, he chose Sarah Knowles. "Why?" she had often bitterly asked herself since. She was neither so beautiful nor so accomplished as many of the others, and her admiration for the pulpit hero had been less openly expressed than theirs. But a nature like William Fay's is quick to recognize its own missing qualities in another, and even a more modest man than he may discover when the full current of a rich, strong, womanly nature sets itself flowing in his direction. There had been a time

when William Fay believed a good deal in himself, but that belief had not been supported either by patience or a profound faith in the ideal.

No woman ever married with sincerer wish to pay the utmost wifely honor where it was due than that which prompted the nuptial responses of Sarah Knowles. When she entered married life it was with the inspiring belief that in this case it stood for no ordinary bond, but for a companionship of the spirit, devoted to the attainment of all good ends. She had not lived through the period of the honeymoon before she learned her mistake, and had to face the knowledge that the man she had elected ruler of her life himself required the constant anxious oversight one gives to a fractious child. Where she looked for moral support and guidance, she found herself continually obliged to correct and sustain, while in practical affairs she soon learned that hers was to be no sweet woman's privilege of dependence. She was not to lean, but be leaned upon by this gifted husband, too much immersed in *dilettante* studies to keep his accounts straight, and liking better to fill the position of social favorite abroad than occupy himself in the dull exercise of husbandly duties at home.

It is hard to say which is the severer blow a woman receives at such a time, that given to her affections or to her pride. Certainly, it is fortunate that pride is there to sustain her. Another help came with the birth of a baby daughter. The holy outlet of motherhood was offered for the wasted love which otherwise might have swept backward and ingulfed its

victim. Moreover, though the inspiration of wifehood was gone, its duties remained, the most sickening of which was to cover up that loss with an unfailing outward habit of wifely allegiance. Still more difficult did Sarah Knowles find it to bring all the devices of womanly courage and cunning to prop the failing fortunes of a man she was first to know must fail.

For the popular idol soon began to wane. The sermons of the young divine, which before had been pronounced models of pulpit eloquence, were now complained of as vapid and sentimental; and where he had before figured as a spiritual Adonis in the parlors of his wealthy parishioners, his presence came to be accounted a weariness. Yet William Fay always had his admirers, people who talked of his sensitive temperament, and spoke of him as an "ornament" to the profession. He left his first parish under no charge of incompetence or failing duty, and for no more tangible reason than a slowly settling cloud of discontent over the church. A few blunt-spoken members did indeed explain the cause in unmistakable terms. "The Rev. William Fay has 'petered out,'" they said; but others were more discreet, and said the pastor's health required a change. There had been several stopping-places between the populous New England city and his last parish. St. Mark's was proud of its latest acquisition, understanding that the new rector had at one time held a distinguished position in the denomination. He was a fallen star, providentially dropped in Litchfield; and

stars, as we know, do not fall of their own accord. The new incumbent had been careful not to disappoint expectation by too zealous attention to his duties, such as a young novitiate, anxious to win his ministerial spurs, might have displayed. By observing a nice social exclusiveness, and writing sermons a trifle above the comprehension of his listeners, he was able to strengthen the opinion that they had an unusual character among them.

William Fay was a man to whom all natural obligations brought a heavy sense of weariness. It was inevitable that, having married a woman, her constant presence in the house should become irksome to him; but, though he had long ceased to take any interest in his wife, he relied on her in many ways, and even affected a sort of pride in her. He called her his Mentor, and talked about "my wife's conscience," as being of a strict order that made it needless he should exercise his own. No one knew so well as she, on whom it was thus bestowed, the nature of her Mentor's office. It is as difficult for a family to get along with a single conscience as with a single fork or spoon. Moreover, the dependence that springs from moral inertness is the last to abandon whatever other claim to headship it may possess, and two decades of married life are not required to teach a wife the returning seasons of marital authority. Mrs. Fay could trust to her husband's indifference in many things of deep concern to herself and so escape opposition, but a trust so poorly founded can provide no safeguard against accident and whim. If

there was any principle that governed the rector's conduct and opinions aside from a love of his own ease, his wife had never discovered it, and it is impossible in such cases to forecast the point of view from which the next disturbing event will be regarded; whether it be the loosening of a board on a neighbor's fence, or a Lisbon earthquake, it is sure to be construed into a new cause of self-injury. Thus it was with many forebodings that Mrs. Fay returned home and tried to forecast the effect of the news she had to relate.

Among others she had seen that morning was Miss Graham, whom she met on the street. These two women had always been mutually attracted, but circumstances had kept them apart. The limits of social intercourse in a village like Litchfield are drawn on many lines, and that which excluded Miss Graham from a visiting acquaintance at the rectory was religious dissent. Her independent views on the Trinity and the first chapter of Genesis were well known. She scorned to hold a pew in any of the orthodox churches, and cherished a dream of organizing a liberal society, keeping up an active correspondence with radical thinkers at other points, and being as well instructed in their ideas as they were. She had organized an Emerson club among some of the young people, and through the insidious paths of literature tried to lead their minds away from a decrepit theology. Helen Dean was a member of this club, and a favorite with the leader.

Miss Graham represented a feminine type that

excited the rector's strongest dislike. Mr. Fay pretended no great hostility nor alarm towards the advancing theological scepticism of the day, being almost as disinterested an observer of the movements of thought as of the world's physical changes. He felt as little inclined to reconcile Darwin with Moses as to measure the earth's orbit with his surplice band; but, though he was not greatly disturbed over modern liberalism, he disliked most of its living representatives. He disliked very earnest people wherever he found them, especially if they were women. The motive which led him to seek the society of the opposite sex — and he sought it pretty often — was not one the lively, upright spinster could respond to. He went to men and books for ideas, such need as he had of them, for he lived in that softer stratum of ideas, called sensibilities; but man's need of woman, when she did not happen to be his wife, was conceived in the symbols of a graceful shape and bearing, heightened by faultless costume, a deprecating glance, and soft hand that lingered confidingly in his at parting. Miss Graham's eyes were not of the deprecating order. Her direct glance and still directer speech irritated the rector, while her odd dress and manners provoked his mirth. It spoiled his appetite to sit down to the table with a woman who wore a purple bow, and who, in an excess of interest in the Athanasian controversy, sometimes mislaid her fork. Thus Miss Graham and the rector's wife always seemed to be looking across at each other from widely severed points, though their homes were but three squares apart. But their

mutual interest and respect instinctively betrayed itself in friendly looks and tones whenever they happened to meet.

"What is this I hear about Maggie Dean?" Mrs. Fay asked, as the two women stopped to speak with each other a moment.

"You've heard a pack of lies probably," Miss Graham replied, in a somewhat higher key than usual. "No, she isn't hurt much," in response to another question; "not so badly as the young man. There's a little justice left in the world, I'm thankful to say."

"You don't like Mr. Gale?" the other said, with a faint smile.

"I haven't anything against him. I've no use for these bandboxy young men myself, with their girl's complexions and little boots; but I suppose the Lord has, or he wouldn't have made them."

The rector's wife did not quite like this manner of speech, but tried not to show it. "I have always liked Maggie Dean," she said thoughtfully. "She is my Bertha's warmest friend. I should be sorry if anything had happened to" —

"What's happened?" Miss Graham sharply interrupted. "A young man takes a young woman to ride. The young woman wants to drive. I've noticed that when a woman wants to hold the reins herself, it is generally because she knows how."

"It hardly proved so in this case."

"Well, I don't know about that," was the deft reply. "It may be Providence intended a smash-up,

and picked out the spunkiest one to bring it about." The listener did not quite like this remark either, and changed the line of thought a little by remarking that she hoped it would teach both of the young people a lesson.

"It will teach Sidney Gale how to part his hair with the left hand, perhaps," Miss Graham made encouraging answer.

"It will teach them both more than that, I trust," Mrs. Fay said earnestly. "I pay as little attention to gossip as you do, Miss Graham, but if it is true that Maggie has accepted attentions from Mr. Gale when he is engaged to his cousin" —

"I don't know whether she has accepted attentions or not," Miss Graham interrupted. "I guess there isn't much doubt he's offered them."

"You mean that he is as much to blame as she, but we know others do not look at things that way."

"Then, it's time somebody taught them," Miss Graham replied, with an energy that showed she was ready to become a pioneer in that sort of education. "See here, Mrs. Fay, you're a woman of sense. I've always said so." The rector's wife smiled and thanked her. "Here's the whole town stirred up over what it calls a flirtation between Sidney Gale and Maggie Dean. What is a flirtation?"

"It's a word I dislike very much, and should regret to hear applied to the conduct of any young friend of mine."

"That may be, but we've all been young in our day, though I've about forgotten when mine was. You

might as well try to keep a pair of kittens from playing together in the sun, as young people from enjoying themselves. Suppose he did walk home with her from school, and suppose Laura Danvers pouted about it — I've no patience."

"I know it's very trivial," the other murmured.

"Trivial! it's microscopical! It's smaller than the smallest speck of dust under my feet. I know that family well," Miss Graham continued, with increased earnestness. "Helen Dean is a young woman in a hundred, and if character amounts to anything in this world, then Thomas Dean stands as high as anybody."

"Yes, I know. I quite agree with you. They have my entire respect." Mrs. Fay did not mean to betray any patronizing feeling, but her companion thought she detected it.

"I don't know why they shouldn't have our respect. As for Maggie, I ought not to say it perhaps, but I happen to know she's engaged to Henry Parsons; a young man that can double up Sidney Gale, and put him in his vest-pocket."

"Is that so?" Mrs. Fay asked, with a look of interest. "I think I have heard something of that before. I know Henry Parsons very well. He has studied with my husband. Mr. Fay thinks very highly of him."

Miss Graham received this commendation of the individual in question to her further favor with erect unimpressibility. "I hope it is true," the other went on. "That gives a different look to the affair."

"I don't see how," was the stiff reply. Miss Graham was a little offended with herself for what she had said, and with reason, since she did not know it was true. "It's a hard lot for a girl when she has to fall back on her connection with some man to save herself from unpleasant criticism. I don't know whether she's engaged to Henry Parsons or not. I haven't been asked to publish the banns."

"Well, we must hope for the best," the other woman said, wearily.

"We must do something besides hope," was the response. "Now, it would only take one or two sensible, clear-headed people — women, say" — looking steadily at the other, "to set this thing right. I should like to take this town by the shoulders and give it a good shaking."

"I wish you could, Miss Graham," with a gleam of admiration.

"But I can't do everything. I can do the punishing, but I can't do the persuading. It takes a softer kind of woman than I am for that."

"Now, you are getting personal."

"I am always personal. You're the kind folks like to listen to. They're not over-fond of listening to me, though they're getting used to it. Then you're the minister's wife; that makes a good deal of difference with some folks," shutting her lips together.

Mrs. Fay thanked her, but felt a renewal of certain doubts which the presence of this acquaintance was apt to arouse in her, and prepared to go on her way,

saying she would do what she could. She added, with a slight accession of dignity, that she was sure her husband would wish to see justice done to all concerned. The two women parted.

"Lord help us!" Miss Graham relieved herself as she went on her way. "There are worse things in this world than being an old maid, and one is to spend your days pretending you're a proud and loving wife, when all the time you're dreading to know what piece of folly or wickedness your precious husband will commit next. I'm sorry for that woman."

CHAPTER XII.

A RUDE SURPRISE.

MRS. FAY was undecided whether to speak to her husband of what had occurred, or leave him to discover it in some other way. It would seem as if she attached less importance to it if she did the last. The rector shut himself in his study after dinner, where he remained until late in the afternoon, coming out with a package of letters in his hand and taking his hat for a walk to the post-office.

Mrs. Fay had said as little as possible on the subject to her daughter, relating the main circumstances of the accident, and repeating nothing of the gossip she had heard. Bertha was full of distress for her friend, and wished to go to her at once; but her mother had other duties for her to perform, which kept her at home until nightfall.

"Sidney Gale! Did you say that she was with Sidney Gale, mamma? How strange!" she murmured, as her mother answered in the affirmative. Then, a moment after, "I wish it had been some one else."

"That is a strange wish," her mother said.

"Yes, I know," smiling a little, "I don't mean just that. I mean I wish it had not been Mr. Gale."

"Why?" her mother asked quietly, but observing her daughter.

"Oh, because — nothing, — only I thought that Maggie — she promised" —

Mrs. Fay saw that there was some girl's secret here, which she was not to be invited to share, and forbore to question further.

Rev. William Fay returned home with a clouded brow, and ate his supper in silence. His walk had been a disappointing one, for many reasons. One of the vestrymen had met him and poured out a long complaint on some matter of church government. He had missed a particular letter he was anxiously expecting from day to day; and, going into a book-store to negotiate for a picture he had seen a few days before, he found another purchaser had preceded him. It was an etched copy of one of Corot's masterpieces. The rector was known to have a rather nice taste in this sort of thing. He could not afford the outlay, but justified his decision on such points with a peculiar process of reasoning. A man must support his nature, he said. If his work is of an intellectual order, he must feed his mind with its proper nutriment, permit himself an occasional indulgence in a book or picture with which to refresh imagination and stir the mental currents anew; as a man of commoner order, like Thomas Dean, must eat the food that shall build up brawn and muscle. He was genuinely vexed at the loss of the picture, and it was while he was irritatedly reflecting on this that he heard the news of the accident.

The most trivial cause of displeasure, when it happens to be the final one in a series of vexatious

events, often appears the most momentous, like the last straw on the patient camel's back. There was another reason why he was ready to make the most and worst of any injurious fact or circumstance connected with Maggie Dean, towards whom he cherished a slight sense of injury he could not have explained, yet which was sufficiently tangible to a mortified self-love.

After the evening meal, Mr. Fay called his wife into the study. First, he repeated the complaint of the parishioner, pettishly remonstrating against the necessity a minister is under to pay respectful attention to every word of paltry criticism and advice any one of the members of his society chooses to offer him, his ruffled dignity betraying itself in every look and tone. She tried to soothe him, but with little success. He did not mention his disappointment about the picture, as he had said nothing to her about his intended purchase; but he dwelt at some length on the inconvenience he should sustain in failing to receive the expected letter, and as the tardy writer was a distant relative of his wife, his feeling of grievance in this quarter was sensibly increased. Mrs. Fay was used to finding herself the unsuspecting cause of most of her husband's disappointments. If the weather was bad, causing a smaller attendance at church than usual, she was made to feel that a little wifely forethought on her part might have prevented it. It was not strange therefore that his next remark should bear a thinly veiled charge against herself.

"There's a nice story going round town about your

favorite, Maggie Dean," he said, thrusting his hands into the velvet jacket he wore indoors, and standing before her with a scowl on his handsome face. She replied quietly that she had heard the story, but deemed it of little importance.

"Maggie has been foolish, perhaps a little imprudent, but we shall do best, I think, to pay as little attention to the affair as possible." Mrs. Fay was too conscientious always to be judicious. A more tactful woman would have refrained from giving even so slight a suggestion as this.

"That is like you," he said. "In your desire to be generous to other people, you quite forget my relation to the case."

"Your relation?" she repeated, in surprise.

"As the girl's pastor, it is my duty to remonstrate with her. Young women are getting more and more bold nowadays. They put young men to the blush."

"Their case must be a sad one if that is true," was the reply. Mrs. Fay now began to be seriously troubled, though rather strangely so, for a moment's reflection might have shown her how unlikely it was that a man like her husband would ever voluntarily trouble himself to perform a disagreeable duty. It would indeed have been a hopeful sign in the rector had he seriously contemplated any exercise of spiritual fatherhood towards Maggie, even of a mistaken kind.

"Surely, William," she said, in an anxious tone, "you do not mean that you intend to deal with a case like this. Maggie Dean is a proud and sensitive

girl. I am sure there are much better ways of influencing her."

"You would like me to leave the matter entirely in your hands, I suppose," with a faint sneer. "But there are a few things I feel competent to attend to myself."

Again, if she had been less intent on the immediate right, she would have let the matter drop. She made no direct reply, but took up another line of argument.

"They are good people," she said. "Her father is one of the oldest members of the church."

"Oh, we all know what a membership of that kind is worth."

"It is worth whatever a good life and sincere belief are worth," was the warm response. "I have been talking with Miss Graham, and she says" —

"It's not of the least consequence what Miss Graham says. You make a strange choice of associates; a free-thinking Amazon, a crack-brained fanatic and revolutionist in petticoats. Don't tell me what a ridiculous old maid like that thinks. I suppose it is because she has had the good fortune to injure me — coming into my church and enticing the young people away, that you like her and quote her opinions."

Mrs. Fay sank wearily into a large leather-covered chair and dejectedly rested her head on her hand. "If you mean that it was through Miss Graham's influence Helen Dean left the church" —

"Let the other one follow if she wishes. She seems to think as well of herself." This in reference

to those unpleasant recollections his wife had no share in.

"She is our daughter's nearest friend," she replied.

"I shall put a stop to that," the rector said, thrusting his hands deeper into his pockets, and taking an irritated turn about the room.

"Then, you will give Bertha the first real sorrow of her life. She loves her friend. Moreover, I have always considered the relation a beneficial one to Bertha. Maggie has the brighter mind of the two. Bertha's temperament is more sluggish."

"A little dull, eh?" her husband said, with a sarcastic accent. "That can hardly be, since every one says she is remarkably like her mother."

"I learned to admit my share of dulness a long time ago," the wife replied. This discussion, which was doing more harm than good to both of them, was fortunately ended by Bertha, who opened the door and looked in at them, dressed for a walk.

"I thought I would run down to Maggie's now," she said to her mother. The latter made no reply, only looked anxiously at her husband, who stood by the table, restlessly turning the leaves of a magazine. A less scrupulous woman would have been quick to seize the opportunity offered by this moment of indecision, would have sent her daughter on her way, and so prevented the thing she dreaded; but Mrs. Fay was without the cleverness that knows how to manage people — husbands especially — which many women boast of possessing. Very likely, if Mr. Fay had not committed himself he also would have

let the opportunity slip, for he was more fond of projecting a line of behavior in his mind than of following it, even when the consequences were not likely to be disagreeable. Then he loved his daughter, in his way, and hesitated to give her pain; but that other figure, sitting in the leather-covered chair, silent and observant, irritated him, and he determined to carry out his purpose. This is the sort of device a weaker nature often employs against a stronger, showing a childish self-assertion, and spending all its force in a single inane impulse.

"Come in, Bertha," her father said. "I wish to speak to you. Take off your bonnet," he added, as she came towards him with a questioning look on her face. "I do not wish you to visit Maggie this evening." She looked disappointed, but began to untie her bonnet-strings. "You wish me to help you about something, papa?"

"No, but I have something to say to you. Your mother and I have been talking together," with a glance at the sitting figure. "I am not at all pleased with what I have just heard about Maggie."

There was a third listener to these words. Maggie, coming up the rectory steps, had just entered the adjacent sitting-room, and, through the open study door, heard all that followed.

"You mean about last night, papa? Maggie did not intend anything wrong, I am sure. She does not care about Mr. Gale."

"My dear," her father replied testily, "it is much more likely to be a question whether Mr. Gale

cares for Maggie." Here such a strong feeling of revulsion seized Mrs. Fay that she half rose from her chair to leave the room, then sank back in her place once more, covering her face with her hand.

"A young woman has no right to lay herself open to public gossip. When she does, she is no longer a suitable companion for a daughter of mine."

"O papa! you do not mean that I am to give up Maggie," his daughter cried. In the outer room Maggie stood with bated breath and wide distended eyes. Every particle of color had fled from her face, and things seemed dizzily whirling about her. She caught the nearest chair for support while she bent eagerly forward to listen.

"That would be so cruel, papa," she heard Bertha go on, in a trembling tone. "If she is in trouble, she needs me all the more. And if she has behaved foolishly or made a mistake, she will say so. She always does."

"Then I am to understand she is rather in the habit of making mistakes?" her father inquired, in mildly jocular tones, trying to relieve himself of the unpleasant strain of the situation.

"No, papa, not more than the rest of us; and Maggie has much better ideas about things than most girls."

"That may be, my dear, but I am the best judge of a desirable companion for you. There are other reasons why I do not think you have made the wisest choice. When you were in school, it made little difference; but now you should see for yourself

the impropriety of selecting just that sort of person for an intimate companion." Here the figure in the chair clasped the arm with a strong nervous pressure; while the young girl looked at her father with pained and wondering face.

"But, papa, I love Maggie better than any one else. She is not to blame that her father is — I am sure my mother does not feel" —

She stopped. Mrs. Fay dropped the hand that shielded her face, and turned her eyes slowly on her daughter, with an expression that the latter failed to read, though it checked her. Rebuke, warning, entreaty; it seemed made up of all three, and a wandering doubt crossed her mind, that had troubled her once or twice before, of some impassable gulf of difference between these two nearest her.

"You cannot judge of a question like this. It is not becoming for a young woman in your position to make the house of an uneducated mechanic her favorite visiting-place," the rector went on concisely. "You should seek associates on your own level. Would you like to invite Thomas Dean here to tea?"

"I don't know," his daughter hesitated. "I don't suppose he would come." She felt the inadequacy of this answer, and turned another beseeching look towards her mother, who again sat with shielded face.

"You need not behave rudely or unkindly to any one, but you understand my wishes, and I expect you to pay some regard to them. We need not talk of the subject further." Unheeding his daughter's

distress, and cutting short an attempted reply on her part, the rector took his hat and stepped out of the low French window into the yard below. The task he had set himself had proved more unpleasant than he had thought, and his dissatisfaction was increased by the knowledge that he had been obliged to assume a very unheroic attitude in Bertha's eyes, wont to regard him as a superior mortal. He had an irritated wish to cut short a scene in which he appeared to disadvantage, and was a little angry with every one concerned in it except himself. He felt the need of the cool evening air to soothe his disturbed nerves.

Bertha sprang impulsively towards her mother. "O mamma! is it true? Must I give her up?" she cried, the tears running down her cheeks. "What has happened? Why is papa angry?"

Mrs. Fay had risen and placed her arm about her, hiding her child's face on her shoulder that she might not look at her. "I cannot talk to you now, Bertha," she said, struggling to command herself. "You must obey your father, of course. Hush, don't cry so. You must be patient. There — there — I must go now," and she almost forced the weeping girl from her, and hastily left the room by a door leading to the stairway, and to her room above. Bertha remained a few moments where she was, still weeping, then, when she had grown a little more quiet, took up her bonnet and walked slowly into the sitting-room.

"Maggie!" she exclaimed, in sharp surprise, when she caught sight of her friend. Maggie stood in the same place, hesitating whether to fly or remain. She

looked pale and defiant, and trembled like a leaf. Bertha saw at a glance that she had heard all. "Are you going?" she asked, as, without speaking, Maggie gave her one long look of anguished reproach, and turned to pass through the door.

"Am I going?" Maggie repeated, wheeling towards her. "Am I likely to stay, do you think?"

"Then you heard — O Maggie! don't look at me like that," and Bertha clasped her hands imploringly. "I shall always love you. Papa did not mean I might not love you, — only he thinks — it is all so strange — oh, I am sure everything will all come right again."

"Your father only thinks," Maggie answered, with heaving breast and flashing eye, "that when a girl gets into trouble, and people who don't know her blame her, those who do know her and could help her should blame her too — especially if she happens to be 'that sort of person.'"

"You mustn't say anything against my father, Maggie," said the other tremulously.

"Why not?" the injured girl hotly demanded. "Have you never said anything against mine? You look down on him because he works for a living, and you look down on me."

"Maggie, I never did" —

"But he is the better man of the two. He would never behave so meanly as that. A minister, too, who ought to be better than any one else."

"Maggie, I will not listen."

"Is that the kind of religion the Bible teaches?

Is that what Christ taught? His father was only a carpenter."

"Maggie, you ought not to say such things. It is wicked."

"Wicked!" the other exclaimed scornfully. "I shall grow wickeder before I get through, and it will be your fault. Then your father will say he did right to separate us, and that I was not a fit companion for you." She turned to pass swiftly out of the house, but Bertha's voice, calling to her in a distressed tone, arrested her.

"Maggie, Maggie, don't go away like that; don't be angry with me. I am not to blame. I mean — of course, I must obey my father." She broke down, sinking into a chair and weeping bitterly. "But I shall always love you," raising her streaming eyes. "And it makes me so wretched, Maggie," her tears starting afresh.

Maggie looked at her a moment, and her own suffering, sharp as it was, was lost in the sight of her friend's. She stepped quickly to her side and threw her arms about her. "I know — I know," she said brokenly, her own tears springing forth in a sudden shower, "you are not to blame, but it is the cruelest and wickedest thing in the world. I hate such mean, cowardly ideas, and I hate the people who hold them." To save her life, Maggie could not resist saying this. "But you are the best and dearest girl in the world. I shall always think so. And you — you shall think as well of me," straightening her figure proudly. "I will show people — I will make them ashamed of themselves." She clasped her friend impetuously to her

heart and kissed her, then turned and fled from the house.

Mrs. Fay, hearing the sound of voices from her chamber, descended to the sitting-room. When Bertha saw her, she sprang towards her.

"O mamma! Maggie was here — she heard everything."

"Maggie here?" her mother repeated, in surprise.

"Yes, mamma, and she heard everything. Oh, I think it is so hard."

"Maggie should not have listened," Mrs. Fay said, catching at this little straw of misbehavior on the other side.

"No, mamma, of course not," her daughter replied penitently, "only almost anybody would. And she is so hurt and angry. O mamma! do you think it will kill her?"

"Trouble does not kill us, my daughter; it teaches us how to live." She spoke these words of commonplace wisdom and encouragement in a despondent tone, and her face wore a pinched look of care.

"But I don't understand it," Bertha exclaimed, in tearful protest. "What is to become of Maggie if everybody turns against her?" The words, "I shall grow wickeder before I am through," still rang like a fearful threat in her ears.

"Everybody will not turn against her," her mother replied.

"Then, why should we? We ought to be the first to stand by her. What does papa mean? Do you

think it is right?" lifting her head and looking steadfastly at her.

"Whatever your father thinks right we must do, of course. Men see things differently. Your father is — he thinks he is acting for your good. You must obey him."

"Certainly I shall obey my father," the girl said, with a touch of pride. "Only I can't understand. If you would only talk to him, mamma. You always have so much influence with people." Mrs. Fay turned heartsick away. A heavy weight seemed dragging her to the earth, and a sense of moral suffocation oppressed her. "Don't talk to me any more to-night, Bertha," she said. "Go to your room and bathe your eyes. All may come out better than we think." Bertha obeyed, but reluctantly. Her mother had been right in the warning she tried to give her father. This was her first real suffering, and was the cause of as much bewilderment as pain. It had always been easy to obey her father before.

There was another cause of dimly defined trouble. Her mother — she did not feel as her father did. Bertha felt quite sure of this, though she forbade the thought to take definite shape in her mind. It was very hard, harder to understand than to obey. Fathers were wiser than their daughters, of course, wiser too, when need existed, than mothers — at least that was what religion taught. Her own father's judgment should be questioned least of all, since he was a minister and recognized guide of opinion. Yet, compelled to give up Maggie, Bertha knew she should

never find or care to seek a friend so dear. Her tears flowed faster at the thought, and wet the pillow on which the tired young head was resting.

Her mother remained below, sitting alone in the darkening shade of the summer twilight. An expression of heavy sadness rested on her face, and her whole look and bearing bespoke moral defeat. Suffering is easy to bear in a noble cause, and its fruits of spiritual victory quickly won; but that borne in the daily witness of petty meanness we cannot correct, but seem forced to share and to uphold, kills aspiration and hardens the heart. A feeling of wretched soul-discouragement settled over the rector's wife, a tired distaste of self and the need of living. The darkness, pressing closer each moment, fitly symbolized the gloom within, yet had a friendly touch, shielding her, and hinting a coming end and oblivion of earthly troubles.

Outside, the rector strolled leisurely up and down the garden path. Maggie Dean and her troubles had dropped from his mind, troubled with no other regret than for the lost etching; and occupied in calm, sensuous enjoyment of the summer evening, filled with the scent of garden-blooms, and a faint, warm breeze from the south. From time to time the odor of a mild cigar was wafted indoors.

CHAPTER XIII.

SOME STEPS RETRACED.

MAGGIE'S friendship with Bertha Fay dated from the entrance of both on the four years' course at the High School. She had been very proud of this friendship, and recognized its benefits. The rectory was, in Maggie's eyes, an epitome of that world of culture and refined manners she longed to make her own. Books, pictures, relics of travel, and agreeable conversation, made up an atmosphere her own home was wholly without.

The rectory was a modest establishment, without the signs of wealth, but Maggie cared nothing for that. She had seen something of moneyed greatness, that exemplified in the manners and establishment of Mrs. Briggs, and knew how to estimate it. It was the charm of cultivated manners, and the general impression of social grace and distinction every one derived from a visit to the rectory, that acted on Maggie. She had profited much by this relation, and until quite recently nothing had occurred to disturb it. During her last year at school, Maggie had formed more intimate acquaintance with her friend's father, whom before she had but distant knowledge of, holding him in extreme respect, both for his office and his reputed learning and talent. It was he who

had examined her for confirmation along with Bertha. As the two progressed with the higher branches, he showed increasing interest in their studies, helping them in their lessons, teasing and reproving both together, until Maggie came to feel as free and secure in his presence as in her father's, with a sense of companionship she missed at home.

Maggie grew into young womanhood without experience of that stage of overgrown awkwardness most of her mates, Bertha also to a degree, had to pass through. From merry, unconscious girlhood she passed to bright and charming young womanhood. She was not a beauty, in the correct sense of the term. Her nose inclined to lift upwards, and her eyes, closely examined, were found deficient in color; but faults like these were atoned for by a vivacious disposition and a fresh, mobile countenance that gave play to every variety of youthful emotion. The element of personal attraction, which cannot be explained by an eyebrow's curve or shell-shaped ears, was one Maggie had possessed since childhood. Sidney Gale had recognized it, and found it difficult to resist. All her young acquaintances acknowledged it. Her older acquaintances felt it also. Judge Foster became sensible of it on graduation day, when he asked for an introduction to her, and felt it anew every time he met her, were it only for a passing bow in the street. Mrs. Fay admitted it by bestowing on Maggie a motherly interest and affection second only to that Bertha received. The rector, also, had noticed Maggie. He noticed every woman he met, either to

condemn or admire, never looking at the first a second time if he could help it, and looking at the others a good deal. Once or twice, Maggie had caught his eyes resting on her in a way that impressed her unpleasantly, before something occurred to deepen this impression and to change her affectionate regard for this friend into a feeling of rising fear and distrust.

The rector was a man of many accomplishments and half-developed talents. He was a good classical scholar, and could render valuable service to Henry Parsons in the study of Greek and Latin writers. He had some skill in verse-writing, and St. Mark's was proud of a rector who could add to the interest of anniversaries and other special occasions with an original hymn. He was a good singer, lending a cultivated baritone to the efforts of the choir on Sundays. He also had considerable skill in painting and drawing. The rector, indeed, believed he had missed his right place and calling in the world, and that his true vocation was that of the artist, with a special gift for ideal portraiture, combining Fuller's tender spirituality with Boughton's grace and finish. He had made a very pretty sketch in water-colors of Maggie and Bertha, the two young heads bending towards and lightly resting on each other, like a pair of opening buds.

One day he was examining some botanical drawings of the two girls, praising and criticising, adding a line here, and deepening a shade there. They were in his study, and the table was strewn with papers containing the sketches.

"You take more pains with Maggie's, papa, than with mine," said Bertha, in pretended pique, after watching her father's lengthened attempts to correct a not very successful representation of a thistle-branch belonging to Maggie.

The rector replied with an easy laugh, raising his eyes and fixing them on his young parishioner a moment in the way she had learned to dislike, and which now caused the hot blood to mount to her cheeks.

"That is because your work is so much better than mine," Maggie said, speaking lightly to cover her embarrassment. A few moments after, Bertha was called from the room. Maggie gathered up her papers to follow.

"Don't go," said the rector, in a low tone, and what she felt to be a disagreeably intimate one. He was standing near her, and as he spoke laid his hand over hers, resting on the table. It had a warm, caressing touch, yet to Maggie it seemed to own some viperous quality; for she drew hers quickly away, the hot blood again surging over her face. Her young eyes flashed indignant surprise at the man beside her. A slight flush rose to his own cheeks, but he looked less ashamed than annoyed.

"I beg your pardon," he said carelessly. "I — I thought it was Bertha." Maggie took up her papers and left the room without a word.

Afterwards, she was rather frightened at this excessive treatment of one whose position demanded the largest construction to be put on all his actions. Away from the rector, she would contritely argue

back a portion of her old regard and confidence in him; but in his presence the old feeling of distrust would again arise, and she avoided him as much as possible.

As for the rector, he had been both amused and chagrined at the little episode in his study; but wounded self-love easily gained the mastery of other feelings, and he ceased to take an interest in his daughter's friend, all his after-conduct towards Maggie being tinged with cold respect and supercilious-ness. He seemed to have dropped acquaintance with her, and if she became the subject of conversation at the rectory, Bertha and her mother found themselves obliged to defend her in unexpected ways against various obscure charges and much slighting criticism.

Aside from this little cause of resentful feeling towards the younger daughter, Mr. Fay's relations with the Dean family had, as intimated in the conversation with his wife, suffered some previous disturbance.

Thomas Dean had been a faithful member of the mother church all his life, inheriting his belief from a long line of peasant ancestry on a tenant farm in England. Ever since he came to Litchfield he had been a regular occupant of one of the back pews at St. Mark's, where he went through his part of the service with docile obedience, and an expression of childlike trust and gravity on his face, that fitly symbolized the tranquil faith within. He did not always understand the sermon, and made no attempt to settle any intellectual problems involved in church member-

ship. What he loved in church-going was the service. He knew the responses by heart; and an acute observer, watching him during the organ's solemn appeal in the voluntary, or some uplifting chant, might have noticed certain fine workings in the lines of his face, as if a hand were gently sweeping over the inner heart-chords.

His two daughters had been duly christened and confirmed, and, until lately, all of his family had accompanied him regularly to church. But about a year ago the older daughter suddenly ceased attendance, and it became known that Helen Dean, through the influence of Miss Graham and the Emerson Club, had been led to replace the religious doctrines in which she had been brought up with new and independent views of her own. When questioned on the subject, she showed no wish to evade matters, but answered all inquiries with simple directness and an undisturbed demeanor, going quietly on her way as if nothing had happened. For that matter, it did not seem to her as if anything had happened, since the progress towards her present point of view, startling as it was to others, had been most gradual and orderly in its effects on herself.

There was no one who felt more satisfaction in this affair than Miss Graham; but, with strange inconsistency, she resented the idea that she had had anything to do with it.

"Helen Dean is a girl who does her thinking with her own head," she said: "she doesn't have to borrow mine. I may have had something to do with the

start she took. I loaned her some of my books, it's true," with a peculiar smile; "I've loaned other people books. If I call people's attention to a fine view there is from a particular hill-top, I'm not to be thanked for the breath they spend in climbing up there to see it. Neither am I to be thanked for the view: but I haven't heard of anybody that's wanted to thank me much in this business."

Naturally, it was deemed necessary for Helen's pastor to visit and remonstrate with her. Duties of this kind Mr. Fay regarded as the most wearisome part of his professional labors. He was in truth very little interested in the personal views of any of his congregation, still less in any young woman's views, and least of all in a young woman's who really had any. It also offended his official dignity that one of his flock should enter on an independent study of topics it was his province to instruct her in. The self-reliance which marks the behavior of the young woman of the period displeased him whatever form it took, the more when it assumed the right to question those principles he was publicly pledged to uphold. Then, he disliked controversy of all kinds, even, as he would have said, with his equals. His love of ease rebelled against the necessity of demonstrating, with logical rule and formula, the soundness of those ideas he was himself content to hold in the *dolce far niente* of agreeable sentiment.

His interview with his former charge was not fruitful of increased good feeling on either side, and Helen disliked it as much as the rector did. She was

without the youthful desire to proselyte or make good her cause with wordy argument. She made little attempt to defend herself to her old pastor, though she recognized his right to question her, answering his questions as intelligently as she could, and listening with respectful attention to the little homily he had prepared for the occasion. When he pointed out the snares and pitfalls that lie in the way of self-confidence, she could only admit them and express the hope that she might avoid them, acknowledged her inexperience, and ended by saying that she desired only to know the truth.

"That is the way youthful infidelity always talks," said the minister querulously. "Take care the truth doesn't prove too big for you to handle when you get it."

Helen colored a little and said she had not yet felt overburdened. She wondered if the rector really believed in his own power to influence thoughtful opinion with arguments of this kind.

Rector Fay next paid a visit to Helen's father. This visit seemed more unreasonable than the other, but he knew it was expected of him. He took the direction of the railroad shop one afternoon when he went out for his usual walk.

It is worth considering what the perfect manners of the perfect minister would have been under similar circumstances. Rev. William Fay had a manner that took on very significant changes in the company of different people. To some he was the embodiment of kindly courtesy, while others never came into his

presence without being made to feel the boredom which their society was inflicting on their spiritual leader. There were also times when his manner had an unusual brusqueness, coupled with a familiarity that lowered the whole moral tone of the man. This was when he was with those who had made themselves offensive to him in some way, or who were his social inferiors.

"You should talk to that girl of yours, Dean," he said. "Why did you let her get that nonsense into her head about leaving the church? It's perfect folly, and a disgrace too."

The two men were standing in the open door of the shop, the foreman in his soiled shirt and leather apron, his large, rugged frame and face streaked with grime, presenting a strong contrast to his gentlemanly-looking visitor. The minister's words brought a dull red into his cheeks. "I ain't afraid of neither one of my girls disgracin' no one," he replied slowly. "Helen may think she don't want to go to church no more, but she's a good girl — she's a good girl."

"Oh, that's all right, my man. Your girls are good enough, of course; but when a young woman sets herself in opposition to her parents and her minister, it's time somebody interfered."

"Helen ain't never set herself in opposition to her parents that I know of," her father answered, with a little obstinacy. "I don't say I ain't as sorry as anybody that she's fallen out with her old ways. It hurts me not to see both o' my girls settin' on the

other side of their mother in church, as they've always done. I've set in the same pew now for twenty-five years, and" —

"Yes, yes, we all know you are a first-rate Churchman, Dean. I've no fault to find with you; but these new notions your daughter has got into her head, her calling herself a rationalist and all that, reading infidel writers and quoting their opinions, — that's not respectable, you know."

"Well, I ain't a man who interferes with other folks much when they're full-growed, even with my own children; and, as for callin' hard names, I've noticed it don't gen'rally make folks think much dif-'rent. I own, though, I'm a bit troubled sometimes about another thing. If the Church is the only means of grace" — he paused, and sighed in a troubled way. The minister stood looking down to the ground, making holes in the charred earth with the point of his cane, and did not offer to come to his parishioner's assistance. He had a refined dislike of entering on the too serious phases of a subject.

"But I can't help thinkin' we don't know all about it yet," the other went on, more hopefully. "It's hard to see how God could make a world full of folks, most of them wantin' to behave themselves, with only one little doorway to get through. It don't seem to fit in with my notions of him. Why, then, did he make the rest o' things so dif'rent? — the sky so big and peaceful-like;" the speaker raised his eyes to the blue arch above, "and us humans so'st we wouldn't hurt a fly if we could help it. It looks so

kind of conterdictory, you know. I hope I don't offend you, sir" —

"Oh, no offence," replied the other lightly. "The Church settles those questions. She doesn't hold to the vulgar notions of the evangelicals. She gives herself plenty of room. The Church is broad enough for anybody, besides being one of the world's great historical monuments." He paused. With any one else he might have regretted the choice of the last word, but with so guileless a listener as the present one, it did not matter. The rector was not without a little amusement on his own part over the ambiguous praise which the term he had selected conveyed.

"I believe all that, sir, I believe all that," his listener respectfully answered; "an' I wish't Helen could see as I do, but I ain't over-good at explaining things." The old shadow of pained self-distrust crept over his face. "Our children — they get beyond us somehow; I don't mean less lovin' 'n obedient, but they get beyond us." He ended with another sigh. The minister looked at him curiously. "There's a good deal of native sensibility here," he thought, "though the man has the look of an overfed ox. I suppose a novelist might make a romantic character out of him."

"But you're her father, Dean, and you say she's a good daughter," he said aloud. "Then, if you told her your wish in the matter she would heed it."

"Yes, sir, she'd mind what I said if I thought best to say it, but I hain't never cared much for that kind o' mindin'. There's her mother, now," he added.

"Perhaps you'd better talk to her." Thomas Dean wished to pay the utmost respect to his minister; but the situation was not an easy one, and work was a little pressing that afternoon. "Mis' Dean is a good deal spryer with her tongue than I be," he ended, with a faint smile, as he bade his visitor good-day, and turned back into the shop.

The rector picked his way daintily over the dusty roadway. Mrs. Dean gave him a hospitable but not too flattered greeting, and ushered him into the apartment of state, rolling up the shades, and drawing forth the big rocker. Mr. Fay rather enjoyed his calls on this particular parishioner, whom he found very entertaining for the space of half an hour, at the end of which he began to grow a little weary perhaps, but he had staid long enough then, and could take his hat and go.

"I ain't no 'Piscopal myself," Mrs. Dean said, when, after a few discursive remarks on the weather and other introductory topics, the rector led up to the main object of his visit. "I'm a Baptist," straightening her trim figure. "All the Weatherbys is Baptists — born so. But when I marry a man," she spoke as if this were as frequent a form of experiment as the spring cleaning, "I expect to go to his church, same as I expect to sit down to his table."

"You set a very good example, Mrs. Dean," said the minister approvingly. "Most women compel their husbands to go to church with them."

"I ain't sayin' what other women do, though I

don't know but what it's just as well in the long-run. I guess some of their husbands would hate the trouble of decidin' where to go themselves. I don't pretend to be one of the meekin' kind myself. Mr. Dean generally knows my opinion."

"And sets a high value on it, too, I've no doubt," Mr. Fay replied, in a gallant tone.

His hostess's keen eyes rested on him a moment as he sat there before her in a lounging attitude. It was like pelting a piece of polished marble with balls of cotton, trying to effect an entrance into the good graces of this kind of woman with a compliment.

"Well, I ain't never heard him say how high," she answered dryly. "We get along."

"But your daughter's new notions are even more at variance with your way of thinking than with her father's," the rector began again. "The Baptists hold much stricter views than we do."

"I know they do," was the reply. "There ain't much mincin' matters with the Baptists. I don't know whether Helen's views are dif'rent from mine or not. I ain't compared 'em to see." Mrs. Dean would as soon have thought of conferring with her daughters on some household matter, a new kind of laundry soap, or the best method of preserving fruit, — matters which experience and native competency had long since determined she should settle for herself, — as to have discussed a question of religious belief with them.

"Then you take no interest in your daughter's pretended change of belief?" There was a little addi-

tional edge in the minister's tone as he put this question. He was getting tired.

"Oh, some folks have to change. I don't happen to be that kind. They say it takes all sorts to make a world, though there are some sorts, it seems to me, we could get along without. But there was never much pretending about Helen. If she says she's changed, she's changed."

"But if you are a good Baptist, you must admit that there are very serious consequences involved in such a change." The minister, as we have seen, was not concerned about these consequences himself, but he was willing to play on another's belief in them.

"Well, I guess I ain't never been much scared about them kind o' consequences. Anyway, I couldn't scare Helen. And I don't deny but I've got a dif'rent notion of everlastin' punishment myself since I've found out it begins here."

It was evident the minister was not to find his needed ally here, and after a little further conversation the parochial visit was brought to an end.

"That man has got about as much backbone as a willow sapling," Mrs. Dean said to her husband that evening, discussing this visit. "Much good it'll do him botherin' about Helen. If my girls had been brought up Baptists, I'd answer for it but they'd stay so. But he's your minister, Mr. Dean."

Her husband found food for new uneasiness in these remarks.

"You don't mean Maggie's goin' to leave the church, too," he said anxiously. The vision of the

family pew quite bereft of the two youthful figures that had helped to fill it, himself and his wife sitting there alone, gave him a real pang.

"Maggie!" his wife exclaimed impatiently. "Don't ask me what she's going to do. It's as much as ever she knows she's in the church." Maggie had been peculiarly trying that day, wanting a dozen things she could not have, and opposing her mother in many ways. "But, as I was a-tellin' Mr. Fay, — I hope I ain't afraid to speak my mind when it's needed, — if he expects to keep the young folks, he must do somethin' to entertain 'em. If he'd get up a revival, now" —

"Oh, but we never do that, you know," her husband interrupted, with a slow, deprecating motion of the head. "'Tain't the best kind of religion that's got in them ways. There's too much 'xcitement and — and — yes, too much 'xcitement," feeling the poverty of words. "Now, there needn't be anything in religion to 'xcite a body."

"Mr. Fay's religion never did excite me much," his wife observed parenthetically.

"I don't want no revivals to keep up my belief in what I've found out's good to believe in already. I'd as soon think of gettin' up my appetite by swingin' my arms, instid o' doin' my day's work."

"Well, you can't say but revivals do some good," Mrs. Dean replied. "They piece out the membership. They had sixty-three new converts at the Baptist meetin's last winter. The church was crowded every night, and they had to bring in chairs. I ain't

heard of any chairs bein' brought into St. Mark's — lately," with derisive emphasis on the last word.

"'Tain't them kind o' things that counts," her husband replied stoutly. "And religion don't come that way. You'd think, to hear some folks talk, that religion was somethin' that always caught a man sudden, when he wan't lookin', like a fit o' the cramps. Now, religion ain't made to scare you; it's what keeps you quiet and steady like. It gives you the feelin' o' bein' at home in the world. Religion makes you see how things are put together that elsewise you might think had just happened. They all belong — little and big. They're all His. He takes care of 'em." Thomas Dean's voice sank, and his wife did not try to answer him.

The words of the Sunday chant came into his mind, with which he silently finished the thought so difficult to shape in words, — "In His hand are all the corners of the earth, and the strength of the hills is His also."

CHAPTER XIV.

PROGRESSING EVENTS.

Absorbed in her own affairs, Maggie had paid little heed to her sister's withdrawal from the church, except to regard it as part of Helen's queerness. She did not share her sister's intellectual curiosity in some matters. If any change were to be wrought in her own opinions, it would be through the personal relations growing out of them. Now that she did not like Rector Fay so well, she might fall out of the habit of church-going. Helen's logical mind prepared the way carefully before her, from sheer love of inductive reasoning, so that when the time came for action she knew what to do; but an emotional creature like Maggie is destined to learn nothing except by accident. Every new experience takes the form of an overmastering surprise, either of joy or pain. The progress of the two sisters typified very well the two theories of the earth's development, the continuous and the spasmodic.

There is no more poignant centre of experience than a suffering heart, self-existent in misery. For weeks, Maggie knew what reality lies in unhappiness. Her world lay shattered at her feet. One disappointment had followed another, culminating in that disastrous stroke of fortune which brought her old prized relations to the rectory to an end. Everything that

had happened before seemed like a mere mote of misfortune compared to this crowning injury. She had profited much by this association, though no one seemed to notice it but Mrs. Fay.

It was impossible for the rector's wife to come into superficial contact with any one, and she had grown to feel almost as strong a sense of responsibility towards Maggie as towards her own daughter. Recent events had but increased this feeling, at the same time blocking all expression of it. This was not the first time the wife and woman had warred within her. She pondered long over the problem of her future behavior to her old favorite; but questions of this kind are seldom settled by abstract reasoning, and await the decision that comes with the first call to action. Mrs. Fay met Maggie on the street a few days after her last visit to the rectory. Maggie flushed, and, raising her head, passed her old friend without further sign of recognition, though the latter, under some swift, unscrutable impulse, had stopped and half extended her hand. The girl then heard her name spoken in a quick, entreating tone, that compelled her to turn.

"Maggie, why do you treat me like this?" Mrs. Fay said, drawing towards her and speaking in a tone of gentle reproach. Maggie's cheeks were still aflame with the burning feelings within, and her eyes smarted with the effort to keep back the tears. "Have I done anything to deserve this behavior from you?" the older woman inquired, as the other remained obstinately silent.

"Done anything? I should think enough had been done," was the reply. The angry tears found vent now.

"Have I done anything?" her old friend repeated, in a low voice. There was the least possible emphasis on the pronoun, that caused Maggie's tears suddenly to cease, while she looked at her companion with bewildered surprise.

"Not you, perhaps," she answered hesitatingly. "But of course you think as he does," with an angry flash of the eye. "You think I am not a proper associate for Bertha — you take her away from me — you" — A new rush of tears prevented further speech.

"Have I not always been a good friend to you, Maggie, and do you believe that I would willingly make you suffer? But it is not always easy to do what we like; — I mean," correcting herself, "you should learn to trust your friends, and not judge by — by appearances."

"I have trusted my friends too much, I think," was the impetuous reply. "It is time they trusted me a little."

"When you have lived as long as I have, my dear," unheeding this, "you may understand how people may have the best intentions and yet not be able — I mean there are many things which determine our conduct others do not know. We must trust each other."

Maggie's grief was again cut short by surprise. What was it Bertha's mother was trying to say to her? She had never seen this strong, self-reliant

woman so discomposed before. Her eyes rose and fell before the younger gaze fixed on her, and a painful flush colored her cheek. It was as if she were reaching a hand to save her from some threatened danger, while with the other she concealed some fatal hurt to herself. Slowly the conviction rose in the young girl's mind that Mrs. Fay did not share all her husband's opinions; but sympathy for her friend's difficult position could not overcome a resentful feeling on her own behalf.

"Do you mean that you do not feel as he does?" she asked abruptly. "Then why do you not tell him so?"

"You should not speak to me like that, Maggie. I have said we must trust each other. I trust you. You are in trouble, I know, and trouble is hard to bear, especially when we are young, before we have — got used to it." She paused to collect herself, and Maggie looked at her with growing wonder.

"There are different ways of bearing trouble, Maggie. If we do nothing but fret over it and blame others for it, we make it larger, and it makes us hard and selfish; but if we try to bear it bravely and keep to what we know is right, then nothing else can hurt us much. We shall grow strong and learn how to help others."

"You trust me," Maggie repeated doubtfully, as the other paused a moment. "Then you do not believe" —

"And that is what life is for, Maggie, — to teach us to help others," the other hurriedly began again;

"not just to get what is good and pleasant for ourselves. Remember that, dear; and when things go hard with us, and we think we are not justly treated, that is a new chance given us to show what is really good in us. Nothing has any power to hurt us, Maggie, except our own wrong-doing." She paused. Her voice had fallen into a solemn cadence towards the last, and her eyes were fixed yearningly on the young face, mystified and half alarmed, looking up to hers. She extended her hand again, and Maggie clasped it impulsively.

"Oh, you are good," she cried. "I shall always believe in you. But the rest — I will never forgive" — she checked herself, pressed her friend's hand impetuously in both her own, then, abruptly dropping it, turned and walked rapidly away.

The healing effects of this interview began to appear before Maggie herself could recognize them. Out of her wrecked happiness something very precious was unexpectedly left to her. The old, sweet belief in other people's goodness was not wholly destroyed. Since her visit to the rectory, Maggie had gone about with a feeling of hot outrage in her heart, that overcame every other, nursing a vindictive anger that threatened to consume her for its first victim. Then came a period of stolid resignment and accepted unhappiness, hard for the young to bear. The sense of injustice, that at first carried with it the sting of continually renewed suffering, threatened to settle into a hardened conviction, and Maggie began to support herself on that half-proud consciousness

of unearned cruelty and wrong which martyrs feel.

Her friend Bertha shared this feeling to a degree. The two did not see each other again that summer, Bertha having gone with her father on the promised vacation trip to Colorado; but they exchanged two or three letters. Each had professed undying affection for the other, and, in an exaltation of unhappiness, submitted to the fate that separated them. There was nothing on Bertha's part to check or imbitter this high resolve. Maggie's was the real *rôle* of martyr-like faith and courage. It was hard to condemn the father without letting a little of this feeling overflow to the daughter, and that Maggie was able to do this showed she had something of her sister's power of logical discrimination. She was not conscious, however, of having given any severe reasoning to this subject, and her continued faith in her friend was rather to be attributed to the strength of her affection.

Everybody would not have said that Maggie had an affectionate nature. She by no means loved every one she met, a prevailing kindliness of disposition sufficing with her, as with most popular favorites, for the general need. Maggie's nature was too open and joyous to be eaten up with narrow loves and hates. She had never hated anybody, did not hate Mr. Fay, only despised him. Another girl in her place, with Helen's example before her, might have manifested this feeling in an abrupt withdrawal from the church; but Maggie took perverse satisfaction in a more regular attendance than usual. She had a youthful feeling

that her constant presence annoyed the minister more than her absence possibly could, besides disproving his mean opinion of her. It seemed to her at first that the spiritual effects of church-going must be lost in the rude disappointment she had suffered in the character of the officiating minister; but she was surprised and rather pleased with herself to find this was not so. The words of the sacred chants and the solemn responses fell on her heart with a new force and beauty all their own, quite dissociated from the white-robed functionary in the pulpit. Maggie could not quite understand this, and concluded she must be more religious than she supposed. She found it more difficult to give respectful hearing to the sermon, where the speaker's personality became disagreeably manifest; though she admitted to herself that the abstract merit of a minister's discourses was quite independent of the application revealed in his own life and character.

To outward appearances, Maggie conducted herself in her usual manner, entering into the summer gayeties of the village in her old character of leader and special favorite; but it was a double life she was leading. When she was alone, or when Helen was not near, her gayety was apt suddenly to desert her, and she would spend hours in profound study. A hundred contradictory plans and ambitions filled her mind. Unlike most of her mates, Maggie was unwilling to spend her days in a round of empty cares. She could not be always arranging her room or making over her dresses. Just now she had that addi-

tional stimulus to work and the full employment of her powers which comes with the desire to banish distressful memories. She would "show people," had been the threatening words that closed her interview with Bertha. She would work, she would study, she would improve herself in a hundred ways. She would be discreet and dignified, like Helen; she would learn to say sharp things to people, like Miss Graham.

In pursuance of these dimly defined ideas, Maggie began a course of reading. As it would seem more creditable if the subject were a hard one, she selected Liddell's "History of Rome," saying she would read four chapters a day. At the middle of the first volume her resolution began to waver. She asked herself what was the use of going on when she could not remember what she had gone over; but that, she said, was because of the intolerable dulness of the subject. In her resentment against the ancient Romans for ever having lived to put on her the difficult task of learning something about them, she declared that she hated them all, Numa and his nymph included. She wondered how Henry Parsons could bear to read such things; and then her fancy took a little excursion, and she found herself speculating on what he was doing just now, out there in Dakota. Was he still angry with her? She hoped so, because that would help to keep her angry with him. Discovering this new train of thought, she brought herself sharply back to her starting-point of the Roman Empire.

She concluded to give up Liddell. History was too hard reading for summer, anyway. Something of a lighter order, in the poetic line, would be more suitable. The next book she drew from the circulating library was "Paradise Lost," rigidly prohibiting herself a selection of the nearer poets of her own day, whom she really liked. It was not until afterwards that she remembered Milton was another author of Henry Parsons's reading. Maggie had not read the modern psychologists, and knew nothing of the subconscious action of the will. This coincidence once discovered, she ignored it by saying that Milton was a standard author, and she had a right to read him if she wanted to. She soon began to doubt if she wanted to. She liked the description of the Garden of Eden, and her interest in Lucifer, the hero of the piece, never flagged; but the theological discourses of the angel Gabriel, during his occasional tea-drinkings with Adam and Eve, wearied her almost as much as the accounts of the early Tarquins. She concluded that Milton was too much like the Bible to be good reading for any day but Sunday, when all pastime is of a wearying order, and one has a smaller sense of guiltiness for falling asleep.

One method of killing time is as dreary as another. Maggie wished sometimes that she cared for fancy-work as the other girls did; but nothing seemed more tiresome and ridiculous than to spend hours counting the stitches in a piece of canvas. Life would be an intolerable affair, she thought, if she must waste it in a series of weak, ineffectual devices of this kind,

trying to cheat herself and others into the belief that she was really busy. Had wider social opportunities been hers, she might have been content with the ordinary pursuits and pleasures that fell to her lot; but Maggie had learned that the social homage and position other young women gain through accidental circumstance, she must win for herself, if at all. Maggie's ambition in this respect was not as vulgar as may appear. It was not that she wanted to dress as well as Laura Danvers, or lead a life of fashionable excitement like Dora Briggs. She only wanted to hold a recognized position among the best, and eighteen should not be held to too grave account for its narrow conception of the best. A slight circumstance, but of considerable shaping power, occurred at this time which had the effect to define certain feelings and correct some of her standards.

Mrs. Briggs, who led in the social vanities of Litchfield, was to give a rather unique entertainment for that backward community, combining the features of an evening lawn party and a *musicale*. Maggie's pleasure in her own card of invitation — heavily embossed with the Briggs monogram, done in red and gold — was innocently heightened by an accompanying note asking her to contribute a recitation to the evening's exercises, her local reputation in this line being well established. Her gratified feelings received a little check when Helen returned home, and, after examining the card, read the enclosed note. Maggie was watching her, and her heart sank a little as she noticed her sister's expression.

"She pays you, I suppose?" Helen said, in a peculiar tone, as she replaced the note in the envelope.

"Pays me?" Maggie exclaimed.

"She pays Miss Graham for her music."

"And Miss Graham permits it?"

"Why not? What possible interest can Miss Graham take in a woman like Mrs. Briggs?" Helen asked. "She knows that it is her music and not herself that is wanted, and music is her profession. She puts the money into the fund for the new church."

Maggie thought this last a very poor reason. "I am not a professional," she replied, lifting her head, "and I don't care if she did invite me because she wanted me to recite something. I think that is a better reason than to be invited just because you have money, as Dora Briggs would be if it were anywhere else." This argument seemed quite conclusive while she was uttering it, but satisfied her less when it was finished.

"Are father and mother invited?" Helen asked. Maggie flushed crimson.

"You know they never go to such places." Helen did not inquire if she herself had received a card, but it was impossible Maggie should not now remember she had not. She saw herself suddenly in a new light, the willing recipient of favors not extended to the rest of the household, but she was still too vexed with Helen to be very repentant.

"I don't know why you should be sensitive if you are not invited," she said, turning her irritability in

this direction. "You always refuse invitations when you receive them."

"I am not at all sensitive," was the quiet answer. "On the contrary, I should have regarded such an attention from Mrs. Briggs as presumptuous."

"Presumptuous?"

"Certainly. A woman who chooses not to recognize me unless she is in the store and wants me to wait on her, or at church, where it is her duty. What have she and I to do with each other? She leads her life and I lead mine. It would be intrusive on the part of either to seek the other's notice."

Maggie listened wonderingly, but with a little admiration also. The fact that Helen, the least ambitious person socially whom she knew, a hard-working book-keeper, could rest so calmly and securely on her own judgment in matters of this kind, impressed her in a new way. Afterwards, she was ready to ask herself why not, but just now she was still a little angry.

"It is easy to be philosophical when you don't care about a thing. If I cared for nothing but George Eliot and the Emerson Club" — She stopped with a dissatisfied expression resting on her face.

"I do not complain because your tastes are not mine," Helen answered, — she had many times, Maggie thought, — "but it is right to hold people to their own standards. If you wish to go into society, you must compel society to obey its own rules, if you expect to win its respect. Mrs. Briggs should have called on you if she wished to invite you to her house."

"That is ridiculous," said Maggie. "Of course, she would not take that trouble. Besides, according to your theory, she may be waiting for me to call on her."

Helen refused to see any humor in this, and kept a grave face.

"Going into society!" Maggie repeated. "I don't call it going into society to go to Mrs. Briggs's lawn party."

"Then you have accepted?" her sister said, dismissing the theoretic side of the question.

"Yes, I have accepted," was the rather shame-faced reply, "but if it is any pleasure to you to know that you have made the whole thing perfectly hateful and odious to me, you ought to know it."

"No, Maggie, it is never a pleasure to me to stand in the way of your happiness. I wish you could believe that. I only wish you to cultivate right ideas of happiness."

"Meaning Helen's ideas?" Maggie asked, with uplifted eyebrows.

"No, the ideas which every self-respecting person holds," was the warm reply.

"Oh, self-respect is a quality that has been diminishing pretty fast with me of late," the other said, in a hardened tone.

"Maggie!"

Reckless words like these always raised extravagant fears in Helen's anxious mind. She turned discouraged away.

"Oh, if you feel like that about it, I will write

another note and decline the invitation." Helen pondered this solution of the problem a moment.

"No, that would only make matters worse. You could make no sufficient excuse." She began to fear she had fallen into her old error of over-earnestness.

She was always conscious, in these encounters with her sister, of bringing a too heavy gravity of disposition to bear against Maggie's bright vivacity. She was apt to overdo her part, and failed of adaptability in her older sister's task of guardianship, as people of very strenuous notions of duty and large self-reliance are apt to do; but reflections of this kind generally came too late. Maggie, seeing that Helen was inclined to shift her ground, now grew wilful, and declared nothing would induce her to go; then reluctantly permitted herself to be persuaded, and the little altercation ended with mixed feelings of triumph and defeat on both sides.

She selected her piece and practised it assiduously the next few days, then was seized with a violent cold, and, after a day's ineffectual doctoring, knew her share in the evening's entertainment must be given up. She was not altogether sorry, and, as the time grew near, was rather glad she was to attend the *musicale* in the inconspicuous character of the average guest. She put on her prettiest costume, and betook herself to the scene of festivity. A large number of guests had been bidden. Everybody would be there, Maggie reflected. Sidney Gale, of course, gay and unconcerned as usual; but him Maggie meant

to treat with obtrusive coldness. Bertha Fay would also be present, in her father's and mother's company, doubtless, and Maggie's cheeks reddened a little at this thought. Would Bertha speak to her, she wondered. Certainly she, Maggie, should not speak first. And Laura Danvers, cold and repellent, would be among the rest. Never mind, there were plenty of others, Maggie re-assured herself, and tried to banish painful thoughts.

Coming down into the parlor, she was greeted with artificial friendliness by her hostess, a large, florid woman, who looked warm and excited. She spoke to Maggie, but only seemed to half see her, looking beyond her to other guests coming towards her. The young girl stopped a moment near the door, to await an opportunity of speaking further with her. While she stood there, she saw Bertha Fay on the other side of the room, who smiled and bowed constrainedly and then turned to speak to her father near by. A dangerous lump filled Maggie's throat, and a mist rose to her eyes. Turning quickly away, she confronted Sidney Gale, with his cousin on his arm, just entering the room. They stopped for an exchange of a few chaffing remarks between the young man and their lively hostess, while Maggie, left awkwardly alone, waited for them to pass on. Laura Danvers had bowed coldly, and Gale had passed her with a nonchalant nod that stung her to the quick. Seizing the first opportunity, she made her way to Mrs. Briggs to present her excuses for the failing recitation. Mrs. Briggs stopped her high-voiced chatter to a near

neighbor to stare at Maggie with displeased countenance.

"Not recite!" she repeated, in an offended tone. "How provoking! Of course, if you have a cold I must excuse you; but I invited you on purpose for the recitation."

A painful scarlet dyed Maggie's face, then retreated and left it quite colorless. She drew herself up proudly, and there was an indignant quaver in her voice when she replied. Several people heard her.

"If that is the case, I had better take my leave at once. I am sorry to have disappointed you, and will bid you good-evening."

Looking neither to the right nor to the left, but aware that she had created a small sensation and that many eyes were following her, some with an amused, others with a sympathetic look, she passed upstairs to the dressing-room and down again without speaking, and left the house. Her hostess stood confounded where Maggie had left her, her fat red countenance changed to deep purple. She began to talk in a loud, strained key on different subjects; but it was evident, even to her slow understanding, that she had lost the sympathy of her audience. The story of Maggie's abrupt departure was eagerly whispered from mouth to mouth; and Mrs. Briggs and her showily dressed daughter felt themselves subject to volumes of unspoken criticism as they moved about the rooms, trying to cover their embarrassment in assiduous attention to other guests. Sidney Gale was immensely pleased when he heard of the affair,

and secretly exulted over Maggie's conduct. Bertha Fay listened to the story with flushed cheeks and a feeling of sisterly remorse and compassion swelling her heart. Her father smiled and shrugged his shoulders. It was evident that the burden of sympathy lay on Maggie's side, though she could not know it, who lay sobbing in an agony of shame on her bed in the little dark bedroom at home.

Mrs. Briggs had overreached herself several times before as self-constituted authority in the social affairs of Litchfield; and her rule, founded on vulgar display and a brazen will, grew more and more irksome to her subjects from this time on. People's instincts are better worth trusting in matters of this kind than the most carefully wrought system of drawing-room etiquette. Young innocence and worth stood its ground in presence of the rude vulgarity that had attacked it. People forgot the ridiculous little episode that had set idle tongues wagging against Maggie for nine days, and spoke of her now only to praise. Miss Graham, it may be assumed, did her best to fan the flame of this rising sentiment, delivering herself of any number of sharp-pointed speeches and epigrams, which kindly disposed people repeated to their principal victim, who writhed under them as under some species of physical torture. Miss Graham had a peculiar kind of conscience. She would have considered herself poorly compensated for the services she rendered Mrs. Briggs, in the check she had received, without the privilege of as much outspoken abuse as she chose to utter. Had the case been dif

ferent and her services gratuitous, she would have willingly added one generosity to another, and held her tongue.

Maggie's social ambitions had reached a sudden climax, though that of revolt against the limitations imposed in false and cruel customs was never outgrown. She now saw very clearly that, missing those accidental helps to social success which wealth or a favored position bestow, she must either evolve these helps from within or set aside their results in favor of another kind, won by different means.

Maggie had no special theories on the sphere of woman, and no ambition to solve any knotty problems or point an example. Her young activities only demanded some kind of natural outlet. The range of employments for women in a town like Litchfield is very narrow, and Maggie had promptly decided she would be neither a clerk nor a telegraph operator. This left her almost no other choice than that of teaching. Consulting no one, she presented herself for examination, an ordeal easily passed; but when she made application for a place in the village school, she found her claims set aside in favor of older and more experienced applicants. She made up for this disappointment by a little extra crossness at home; so that she met with less opposition than she might when, a sudden vacancy occurring, the place was offered to her and she accepted. Her mother scolded and made loud complaint of Maggie's desertion of her natural duties at home. Her father took troubled note of all her looks and actions at this time.

It was all right that Maggie should teach if she wanted to, — he would have gratified every passing whim of hers if he could, — but he had an uneasy feeling that if she were perfectly happy at home, she would not want to teach. The problem was beyond his solution, however, and it was with an increasing hunger of the heart and a pained sense of self-deficiency that he found himself farther removed each year from an intimate knowledge of his children's needs. He was not a close enough observer to know that his was the case of many parents, due to different causes, but meekly laid all the blame on himself. It was that absence of book-learning, he thought, whose loss he had not begun to miss until too late, that kept him the silent, helpless creature he was.

Helen spoke no word, either to blame or to approve, at this time, holding herself rather aloof from her sister, and leaving her to herself; a privilege Maggie would have been more grateful for but for an uncomfortable feeling that she was being watched. If she were to show any sign of weariness, or flagging resolution, Helen would be the first to notice it. Helen, on her part, felt herself by no means so ready to pronounce judgment, and watched her sister with puzzled feelings.

Maggie entered upon her new duties apparently cheerful and content. Six months had passed since graduation day, and, looking back over them, she felt surfeited with a certain sort of experience they had gained for her. We may smile at this, and at the ludicrously slight nature of the events and circumstances

which serve as landmarks in the history of a young girl; but it does not require a Waterloo or the discovery of a new principle in physics to explain the changing currents of the human will and affections. Maggie was at that point where, in earnest but tentative fashion, she was striving to shape her life to some inner standard of usefulness and beauty, outward standards having proved so worthless; but if the reader, impatient of results, skips the intervening chapters to the concluding one, he will find no record of great or startling things accomplished. Maggie became neither a Madame Roland nor a Florence Nightingale, nor, what may be accounted worse, did her wishes ever take such lofty flight. She was only fortunate enough to find a pleasant means of occupation, which contained the additional motive to its pursuit, that by its means she was able to do good service to others. To outward seeming, her life continued to flow on in the dull routine prescribed to the village-school teacher. What new influences, as plain and unexciting as any that have been related, were yet to assist the young, growing soul to a better knowledge of itself, await the telling.

CHAPTER XV.

THE EMERSON CLUB.

NONE of Maggie's family were able to determine her feelings towards her rejected lover. The young man's name was never directly mentioned to her, but Helen did not hesitate to speak of him in her sister's presence. She sometimes read portions of his letters to her father and mother, Maggie, at such times, taking pains to leave the room, or the same pains to remain, feeling she made herself equally conspicuous either way. The letters came regularly, and Maggie wondered, in scornful fashion, what the writers found to write about. She could not understand whether it was a stroke of policy or native indifference that led Helen to make such an open display of the letters, keeping a package of them in one of the bureau drawers they used in common, where they irritated Maggie's vision afresh every day. It was absurd to suppose Helen and Henry Parsons would ever care for each other; though she did not know, veering about, but that it might be a very good thing. They were so much alike and could share all their hard, dismal opinions together. Something happened during the winter to set half-shaped thoughts like these at rest, though not to allay an ever growing surprise in regard to Helen.

Standing by her chamber window one winter night, when the rich moonlight gained a double brilliancy in the wide reach of sparkling snow-crust beneath, Maggie saw two figures coming down the street, standing out in clear relief against the dazzling brightness of the night. She took little notice of them until they paused at the gate in front, when she saw with surprise that one of the figures was Helen's. It was the night of the Emerson Club, and this the hour for her return. Maggie had always supposed that her sister, whose independent habits were well known, returned from the club, as she went, alone, and puzzled her brains to conjecture who her companion might be. She did not know any gentleman belonging to the club who would be likely to receive her sister's permission to escort her home. There were very few gentlemen who attended the club. Besides Principal Goodwin, of the High School, who had a wife and family, and Mr. Sharp, a dyspeptic old bachelor of the village, who would put himself out for nobody, together with two or three young men, Mr. Goodwin's pupils, Maggie knew of no representatives of the sterner sex who profited by Miss Graham's attempts to raise the intellectual standards of Litchfield. The figure at the gate belonged to none of these. It was a head taller than its companion's, and the two remained standing there for what seemed to Maggie a very improper length of time. She wondered at Helen, and the whole thing struck her as most strange and unaccountable. Then it occurred to her that she must not stand there watching them;

so she drew the curtain, and stepped away from the window. As if in reward for this consideration, the two people below separated almost immediately, and a few moments after Helen entered the room.

Maggie looked at her curiously. A hundred sly, tantalizing questions rushed to her lips, but she virtuously repressed them, and but little was said between the sisters as they made their preparations for the night. Helen was looking unusually well, Maggie noticed. There was a delicate flush on her cheek, and a look of pleasant reminiscence in the dark eyes. Her manner towards her sister was very kind, though a fine shade of abstraction covered it and seemed to raise a little barrier between them. Still keeping a quiet eye on her, Maggie saw her take a letter from her pocket, and, without looking at it, mechanically slip it under the rubber band that held the package in the bureau drawer. This gave Maggie a little shock of displeasure, besides irritating her with a fresh remembrance of the letters. Helen did well to talk to her, she said to herself. How was she, who was so much wiser and superior, behaving? receiving letters every week or two from one young man out in Dakota, and presumably writing as many in return, at the same time that she permitted some one else to accompany her home from the Emerson Club and stand at the gate talking a full quarter of an hour. She would have found such conduct in her younger sister very reprehensible, and in her, Helen, Maggie could only consider it heinous. But she forbore to give expression to these feelings, though she lay awake long after

her sister had fallen asleep, to speculate over this new mystery, and the general unreliability of a world that grew more irregular in its behavior every day.

For the next few days Maggie kept an observant eye on her sister, until at last her curiosity overcame her, and she addressed an abrupt question to her.

"What do you do at the Emerson Club?" Helen looked the surprise she felt at this question from such a source. For a moment her glance wavered a little, Maggie thought, then she quietly answered that since the holidays they had been reading John Fiske's "Cosmic Philosophy."

Maggie was baffled. She wanted to ask if that was John Fiske she had seen at the gate the night before, but restrained herself. She had never taken much interest in the Emerson Club, chiefly through a girlish dread of being considered "literary" and "strong-minded," terms of opprobrious meaning in a community like Litchfield. She had always held Miss Graham in half-fancied dislike. Her real feelings in this quarter, however, were compounded of attraction and dread. Maggie liked original people. Though she had never felt greatly interested in Miss Graham, she liked to draw near enough to watch and be entertained by her. She had observed, however, that there were few who seemed to stand in just this relation to the independent spinster. People either enrolled themselves on the list of Miss Graham's adherents, making public acknowledgment of their allegiance to her, or they kept away from her; and heretofore Maggie had obeyed the instinct that kept her at a distance. Now

a stronger motive was added to what had been before scarcely more than a passing curiosity, and when the time of the next club session drew near she boldly announced a wish to accompany her sister.

The results of this experiment were not so satisfactory as she had hoped. It happened to be a dull evening at the club, with a smaller attendance than usual. As Maggie could have guessed, Helen was one of the most active members, holding the office of secretary, and manifestly relied on by Miss Graham in many ways. There was no one there she did not know, and it was quite evident that her sister would have no other company home that night than her own. Once or twice in the discussion of the evening's topic Miss Graham quoted the opinion of some absent member of the club or visitor, whom she called Mr. Norton, fortifying her opinion with his. Maggie knew of no one in Litchfield by the name of Norton, but a hint of studied abstraction in the secretary's manner when his name was mentioned led her to connect the name with the moonlit figure, that still stood plainly in memory. On her way home she relieved the forced silence of the last two hours by asking several questions.

"Do you always have discussion after the paper?" Helen said yes, and added that they considered this the most useful part of the evening s exercises, since it drew out and helped formulate the opinions of those present.

"And does Miss Graham always point her pencil at the one she wants to speak next?"

"I never noticed," was the undisturbed reply. "I think no one has ever objected to the pencil before."

"Oh, I don't object. You might not know she was the leader but for that. What if you don't happen to have an opinion when she asks you for one — a different opinion, I mean? Do you have to pay a fine?"

"Don't be foolish, Maggie."

"I only wanted to know," in a tone of rejected innocence. "But I suppose you could easily provide against that in the constitution. What is Spencer's 'Unknowable'?"

Helen tried to explain as they went on together in the darkness, and succeeded very well. She had the gift of clear expression in the elucidation of themes usually made doubly difficult by the labored obscurities of speech in which they are clothed. They had reached the railroad tracks when she finished, and were nearing home.

"Then, if that is all he means, why doesn't he call it 'God,' as the rest of us do?"

"Because a philosopher, who is trying to establish a new theory, must avoid all dogmatic forms of speech. Every great system of thought has its own terminology."

"Yes, I understand," Maggie hurriedly replied, "but I should not call that a dogmatic term." They were crossing the bridge, and the time was growing short. "I did not know you were an evolutionist. Who is Mr. Norton?" bringing this extraneous talk to an abrupt pause, and plunging into her real subject;

as a bird, after describing several wheeling movements in the air, suddenly dives downward at his prey. There was the least little pause before the reply, and then Helen answered that he was a friend of Miss Graham's, who lived in a neighboring town. She added that he was a minister.

"A minister!" Maggie's surprise was quite natural, for Miss Graham's attitude to that class of people was well known; and this feeling was not lessened by the discovery that the reverend stranger was also an object of interest to her free-thinking sister. Then a new ray of light broke upon her. "What kind of a minister?" she asked.

"He does not call himself by the name of any sect. He is a rationalist. I suppose you might call him a Unitarian."

"Then, why doesn't he call himself that? Is he going to establish a new system, like Spencer? I suppose Miss Graham helped him to get his education."

"No, indeed," was the quick reply. Then more quietly, "Miss Graham does not use her money for such purposes."

"What purposes? You mean that she would not help a minister?"

"It would not make so much difference about his being a minister, if he were not a man."

"Oh, yes, I had forgotten. Do you suppose that story is true, about her having had a lover, and his deserting her?"

Helen said that she did not know, and that the

subject did not concern them anyway. She then took pains to add that she did not think Mr. Norton would be willing to accept assistance of that kind. They had reached the house now, and passed inside, making their way softly to their room, not to disturb the sleeping father and mother below.

There was no one, in the community in which she lived, who seemed to have very clear knowledge of Miss Graham's early history. She had moved into the village six years before, and lived alone, except for the company of an ancient parrot she brought with her. There were two versions of the story connected with her name, which was now a very old one, and which had ceased to excite attention, so that the generation to which the two sisters belonged had heard it only in disjointed extracts and casual remarks and allusions, that whetted curiosity without gratifying it. That version of her early history which her nearest friends held was to the effect that when she was young, and still lived on her father's farm outside the village, Miss Graham was the betrothed wife of one of the neighboring farmer's sons, a young man in poorer circumstances than herself, but with good mental gifts, on whom she had bestowed a share of her private fortune to educate and fit for a professional career. Miss Graham's friends went on to explain that during her lover's absence at a distant college, and the period of her own forced loneliness on the farm at home, he had fallen in love with one of the professor's daughters, and, with a suddenness as selfish as it was cruel, had broken his engagement

to his benefactress. The young collegian and the professor's daughter were soon married, without any attempt on the former's part to fulfil the material obligations to his first love, which remained uncancelled until his death. For he died a few years after his marriage, while still struggling to secure a foothold in his chosen vocation, burdened with debt and the increasing cares of family life. Miss Graham's friends were strong in the belief that this early death was a judgment, many of us being prone to discover a deserved punishment in the painful circumstances that crowd our neighbors' lives.

Those who accepted the other version of this affair, friends of the young man, admitted the main facts as they have been described, but covered them with a host of plausible excuses. They urged that it was not certainly known whether it was Miss Graham herself, or her father, who had loaned her lover the money. Her father had died soon after her betrothal, without knowledge of its unfortunate issue, and was not on hand to testify. They said, with scant appearance of justice, that no one could positively assert the debt had not been paid; to which Miss Graham's friends promptly replied that, if it had been, Miss Graham herself would have been the first to say so, and exculpate the memory of the dead hero. The other side then brought out its reserve of small shot, trying to bruise where it could not destroy, and make small windy apertures in the rock-cased integrity of the deserted spinster. They premised the opinion that it was a very indelicate piece of business for a

young woman to offer her lover pecuniary assistance, — that where a woman threw herself at a man in that way she ought to know what to expect. They wanted to know if Miss Graham's friends expected her lover to keep his word to her after his feelings had undergone a change, and talked in a highly virtuous strain of the danger of loveless marriages.

There is no action, even to the stealing of a set of spoons by an alley thief, which does not admit of some excusing word. If we do not like to suffer from small depredations of this kind, why do we have alleys for the thieves to prowl about and lie in wait in? Many were inclined to make excuses for the young man, on the score of the chosen bride's beauty and high social position. They urged that, as Miss Graham had money and the professor's daughter had none, the recalcitrant lover had plainly not acted from mercenary motives; to which the friends of the first witheringly asked if the quality of mercenariness was considered absent in the man who voluntarily acquitted his creditors of their expectant hopes towards him, venturing the opinion that there were many who would like to gain a reputation for probity in that way.

The one person who had absolutely nothing to say on the subject was Miss Graham. The thin, closely shut lips, so marked a feature in her face when it was at rest, seemed the symbol of an eternal silence. Soon after her lover's desertion, she sold her farm and moved into the village. She had never been pretty, even in her youngest and happiest days; and now,

when love's radiance, which has power to beautify the dullest physiognomy, was stripped from her, people began to notice how very plain she was. Eyes that her lover, under the illusion of early courtship, might have compared to June skies, now showed a lack-lustre quality, that made it impossible to describe them as either blue or gray, though a certain piercing intelligence which they grew to acquire served even better to mark their owner's individuality. Her hair was of that yellowish tint which in her earlier days was sometimes called golden, but which grew thin and faded as the years went on, and gave her, as she said, the washed-out look of a piece of cheap muslin. Like most homely people, Miss Graham made an unsparing use of the most uncomplimentary adjectives in describing her own appearance; while some sinister motive led her to uphold and further nature's aim in the outlandish costumes she wore. If Miss Graham had really wished to tone down her unattractiveness, it would seem that the native wit she showed everywhere else might have led her to the selection of plain neutral tints and some harmony of design and color, which even the most favored of countenance need to consult. As it was, her dress betrayed such a mass of incongruous hues and contradictory lines and angles that it was easy to believe she had set reason at defiance, and sought only to astonish and puzzle the vision of all who saw her.

"I sometimes wish," she said once to Helen, as she stood before her dressing-bureau, combing her hair, "I sometimes wish the Lord had given me a pair of

eyes. You may as well wish you had handsome eyes as a good temper, if you're going to spend your time wishing." She was thinking if it were true, as her favorite, Emerson, says, that "beauty is the mark God sets upon virtue," Providence had made a singular oversight in bestowing on so useful a person as herself an unfinished nose and a freckled skin. Miss Graham was like Henry the Fifth, and never looked in her glass for love of anything she saw there.

"You can buy hair," she added, flinging a small switch over her shoulder, and fastening it to the thin twist she called her own. "But you can't always tell a person by the eyes," changing her tone to one of cautious experience. "I've known people, women mostly, who had eyes that would melt and conquer you at a glance, yet who had no more heart than this hair-brush," dropping that useful article on the bureau. "I don't know how they do it, but they know. No man can stand up against such a pair of eyes, with their sly, beseeching glances, telling him he is a god, every time they look at him. It makes no difference if the owner hasn't got a thimbleful of brains." Helen listened to this talk half pained, half amused. She remembered having heard that the other young woman had fine eyes.

"The eye is not such an expressive feature as we imagine," she said. "I remember a game we played when I was a child, where we covered the face, all but the eyes, and tried to make each other out, but we seldom succeeded. The most expressive feature is the mouth."

"The eyes will always get the credit," was the reply. "And eyebrows," Miss Graham began again, bending nearer the glass to examine the few pale hairs that served as an apology for this missing feature. "I have always liked eyebrows. I shouldn't care for the arched and pointed kind, like those in the fashion books; I don't want to be exacting, but no woman likes to be all forehead."

"Dear Miss Graham, no one ever thinks about eyebrows when with you," Helen said, with excellent intention.

"No, I suppose not," was the dry response.

"I mean that you give us so much that is more important to think about," said the other, with some embarrassment. "I should like to know who has done more for the intellectual culture of Litchfield than you have!"

"Well, that's the severest thing I've heard yet. If the mental progress of this little seven-by-nine town is to be laid at my doors, I'll emigrate. I went into the bookstore the other day and inquired for 'The Light of Asia.' What do you think that mummified piece of antiquity that keeps the store asked me?" Helen could not say.

"Wanted to know if it was a scientific work. I said yes, — that it was written to supplement 'Tyndall on Heat' — that if he would write to the 'Popular Science Monthly' he would find out all about it."

"Mr. Reynolds is getting old," Helen said apologetically.

"We're all getting old, but that's no excuse for

lapsing into the helpless imbecility in which we were born. People talk about second childhood, and there are some who would like a third and fourth as excuse for doing nothing. I should like to know what kind of a heaven such people expect to go to. A place where they can return to the long clothes and nursing-bottle of their infancy, I suppose."

Miss Graham thought a good deal about heaven. She had a strong belief in immortality, fortified by an ardent admiration for Miss Phelps, and a little surreptitious practice on Planchette. Her belief in the life to come was based, not on religious faith or any hard-wrought philosophical conclusions, but sprang solely from her passionate love of justice, the need to project in imagination some future state of existence which should atone for the ills and hardships of the present. The righteous indignation which filled her when reflecting on certain phases of human suffering and wrong, impossible to right except in a waiting heaven and a day of universal judgment, was in spirit not unlike that which inspired David's prayers for the destruction of his enemies.

Settling into village life, she had actively associated herself with the single branch of reformatory presented in the temperance society, her strong, energetic nature giving new impulse to the movement, so that she soon would have become its recognized leader but for her heretical opinions. When these were discovered, there were much alarm and embarrassment among her new acquaintances. This new ally was altogether too valuable to be rejected wholly; and,

though they were afraid of her, prudence and Christian zeal alike counselled the retention of one whose power to help was so manifest, and who had a soul to save no less than the worst inebriate.

When Miss Graham was tentatively approached on the subject, her reply was equally clear and emphatic. "Is it gospel temperance that I believe in?" she asked, repeating her interlocutor's question. "I never thought to find out. I don't believe the gospel will interfere with it, not according to my reading; but if it did, why, so much the worse for the gospel, I should say. You mean, do I think a man is going to be saved from drink just because he repents and joins the church? I should say no, though I don't deny that joining the church ought to help him, but his own will and reason have got to help him more. The gospel helps us to solve one end of the temperance question, science the other. I prefer to put in my work where it is most needed, at the scientific end." Upon which it was reported that the new-comer was a violent free-thinker, who placed the writings of Huxley above the New Testament.

Besides her public labors, Miss Graham spent much of her time in study. She was a voracious reader of all sorts of books, including not only philosophy and poetry, but fiction; for, in spite of her plain and practical exterior, she was at heart as romantic as a girl of eighteen. She was a diligent student of German literature, and a master of that tortuous tongue. She was also an accomplished musician, a pianist with a masterly touch and rare power of spiritual

interpretation; but in music her tastes were as narrow as in books they were catholic. She was a devoted adherent of the German school, and the object of her most devout worship was Beethoven, under whose lead other masters of other realms were forgotten, and music became the dominant passion of her being. Miss Graham received a few pupils; but they were not of a common order, most of the musical aspirants of the village preferring the more popular instructor, Miss Paine, who never offended her patrons by affecting any higher standards than their own. It required a venturesome disposition on the part of any pupil to face Miss Graham and prefer a request for her instruction.

"What do you want to study music for?" was the first question with which she greeted the bold intruder. "Because you really love it and have some talent, or because you want to make a mere show and ornament of it? If it is self-display you are after, you had better keep your money and spend it for ribbons and jewelry. They will set you off a good deal better. Music won't set anybody off. On the contrary, it absorbs and extinguishes you. You can't use music as you would a corsage bouquet, to help people see what a pretty young woman you are. Make up your mind, if you want to study music, to bury yourself alive to begin with. Maybe you will be resurrected some day, and appear before the world as a new Rubinstein or Rive-King, but the chances are you won't. What I mean is, that you are to make yourself as much an instrument of your art as the

piano itself is. I don't say you are to forget you have a soul, or to deny it a little passing enjoyment of what you are trying to do; but, so far as other people are concerned, or any interest on your part in the effect you are producing, you should have no more thought of that than the keys on which you are playing. The true player ought to have but one wish, and that is to efface himself utterly from the earth, and leave only the impression of his music behind him."

It is not surprising that all save a few were discouraged at the outset, and concluded to go to Miss Paine. Those who were brave enough to remain had a further test put upon their courage by what the instructor had to say next.

"Remember, I can't promise to teach you music unless you promise to learn. You'll have to work, and you must help yourself. I can't do your practising for you, nor spend my time looking up new ways to keep you interested. I expect you to keep yourself interested. All I intend to do is to keep watch of you and to collect my pay; and you needn't expect I'm going to give you 'Annie Lisle, with Variations,' at the end of the first term, either."

Miss Graham took a few German pupils also. Laura Danvers had been one. During her return home one Easter vacation, Laura went in to see her old teacher. She used not to like Miss Graham very well; but later associations in her life at college had taught her to understand the eccentric spinster better, as well as to respect some of those ideas and princi

ples which had once aroused only a feeling of lady-like repugnance. She found Miss Graham balancing herself insecurely on a step-ladder, and hanging a new picture. The latter bade her visitor be seated, and went on with her work, calling on Laura to tell her when the picture hung evenly in its place. Then she clambered awkwardly down. A stout servant-girl was called to remove the ladder; and Miss Graham sat down to visit with her guest, who went towards the picture to examine it.

"Ariadne!" she said, reading the printed inscription below the engraving in a doubting tone. "I don't think I remember the story of Ariadne."

"If I was Ariadne, I should be glad you didn't."

Laura turned an inquiring face towards her hostess. "There was something about a spider, wasn't there?"

"You are thinking of Arachne."

"Oh! Then I don't know anything about her. Tell me the story."

"There isn't much to tell. Ariadne was the one who gave Theseus the clew to the labyrinth when he came to Crete to slay the Minotaur."

"Yes, I remember now; and he afterwards married her."

"No, only promised," in a dry tone. "He thought better of it, and on their journey back to Athens deserted her while she lay asleep on the seashore. That's Theseus' sail out there on the water."

The visitor examined the picture more closely.

"What figure is this coming round the rocks?"

"That's Bacchus," with an indescribable accent,

which caught her listener's attention; but she did not understand, and looked her wish for further information.

"She took up with Bacchus, you know."

"Took up with him?"

"Married him, I mean. Theseus was gone, and Bacchus came along just in time to console her. Before that, Ariadne had been walking up and down the sands, wringing her hands and calling on her lover to return. Then she caught sight of Bacchus. He was a merry-looking fellow, and wanted everybody else to be as merry as he was. He set to work to comfort her, and ended by offering to put himself in Theseus' place."

"And she accepted him?"

"Oh, yes, she accepted him."

"With Theseus' sail still in sight?" The younger woman's voice sank in regretful surprise.

"Well, under the circumstances, you couldn't expect her to have any very tender feeling about that. A man that would desert a woman as he did, when she was asleep and under his protection"— Miss Graham stopped. She was getting excited.

"I wonder why he deserted her," Laura asked, looking at the picture with a thoughtful expression.

"Didn't like the looks of her, I suppose, as she lay asleep on the shore."

"Yet he was under obligations to her." A red spot burned in each of the older woman's cheeks. "But I suppose that would only make him dislike her the more."

"Of course; it was a very bold act on Ariadne's part to rush in to help him in that labyrinth business. A more modest woman would have let him find his own way out, in spite of the Minotaur. I think she deserved her fate."

"I don't think I should say that," Laura murmured deprecatingly; "but I don't like Bacchus," turning away from the picture and seating herself again.

"I suppose you would have had her keep true to Theseus, in spite of that shabby trick. You girls are so romantic."

"Not to the Theseus who did that," the other replied softly, "but to what she first believed him to be, her first trust in him; she might have been true to that."

"Um — um. Well, let Ariadne alone now. Tell me about your school and that new room-mate of yours. I don't know what I bought the picture for, anyway. I'm sick of it already. I think I'll hang it in the spare room upstairs." The talk then turned to other subjects.

CHAPTER XVI.

GROWING HORIZONS.

HER visitor gone, Miss Graham wished to go to her piano, but first approached the parrot's cage, which stood in a corner, with a newspaper in her hand. The bird seemed to read some hostile intention in this action, and began to flap its wings and emit a series of hoarse, guttural sounds.

"Yes, I know; you always promise to keep still, but you never do, so I shall either cover you up or take you into the kitchen."

Polly settled down on her perch with melancholy resignation, and a feeble croak, which her mistress interpreted as an expression of choice.

"Very well, then; I'll take you into the kitchen," and bore the cage away. Returning, she seated herself at the instrument. She was still a little excited. Her hands trembled, but, strangely enough, she played unusually well at such times. Some strong, impulsive energy within seemed to find an outlet in her fingers, that ran swiftly up and down the keyboard, through difficult chromatic passages, interspersed with intricate chords and *arpeggios*, executed with a precision and brilliancy of touch that delighted the performer and soon banished disturbed emotions. The sense of empery is dear to us all, and the knowl-

edge that we have learned to do one thing fairly well in this world is a great sweetener of human disappointment.

Whatever Miss Graham did, she did with her might, putting the whole of her vigorous personality into it as long as the mood and occasion lasted. In music, her soul, which elsewhere she compelled to walk on its two feet, took wings, and she revelled in a world of artistic longing and delight. She was largely self-taught in music, and the critical in such matters sometimes spoke slightingly of her efforts in this direction. They said, in the cultivated musical slang of the day, that she failed in *technique*. It was admitted, however, that she had a touch. Her fingers, resting caressingly on the keys, had power to evoke that lingering sweetness and solidity of tone resembling the organ's, with its superior combination of pipe and pedal. Miss Graham was a musician of rare power of expression, and a sympathetic interpreter of the masters. She had studied Beethoven in much the same way in which she had studied Shakspeare, pursuing the composer's idea in the same just and intelligent manner as the special author's under study in the Emerson Class; only, as she explained to Maggie Dean, the range of ideas in music is much larger than in books. This was on the afternoon of Laura Danvers's visit. She was in the middle of the *largo* movement of Opus VII., its strong, resonant passages filling the room, when the door opened and Maggie Dean entered. She stood undiscovered a moment on the threshold, then stepped noiselessly

inside and seated herself near the door. Leaning back in her chair, with a mischievous smile on her face, she waited for the bit of fun that would ensue when her hostess should look round and discover her. This did not happen immediately, and Maggie found herself obliged to keep very still indeed during the *pianissimo* that followed. Maggie had no musical instruction, and did not pretend to any great enjoyment in what was going on; but she liked to watch Miss Graham. The player's complete absorption, and a certain rapt intensity of expression that illuminated her face, struck her with a little amusement, then with respectful wonder. At the same time, the music, though she did not understand it, began to have an effect on her. In a confused way, she perceived that here was a new power and influence at work, which she did not understand. She felt herself subject to a force she could not define; and it was plain that Miss Graham was tenfold more subject to it, but gladly and comprehendingly, while Maggie had a half-irritated sense of being held captive against her will. The music seemed trying to say something to her, which she could not comprehend, much less respond to. She had heard Miss Graham play before, but never under circumstances that compelled her to notice or think about it; and she was in the right mood for listening, being a little tired and downcast from her day's work in school, which had not gone just to suit her. The smile died out on her face, a more pensive expression took its place, and Maggie was lost in a dreamful reverie, broken only by the closing chords.

Miss Graham, slowly turning on her stool, saw her visitor and gave an exclamation of surprise. Maggie rose and explained her errand, which was to deliver a message from Helen. Her business finished, she seemed loath to go, casting an interested look at the piano, where Miss Graham still sat, unsteadily balancing herself on the stool.

"I am sorry I interrupted you," she said.

"That is just what you didn't do," the other replied, in an approving tone. "But I'm afraid you found it rather tiresome waiting."

"Not at all," said Maggie politely. "On the contrary, I was hoping you would go on."

"Why, do you like music?" Miss Graham asked, bending a scrutinizing look on her through her glasses. "Helen doesn't. Now, don't tell me you 'adore' it."

"I don't know anything about it," was the candid reply. "But I have always felt I ought to know something about it, and I'm sure there is something worth knowing."

"That's quite an admission." Miss Graham wheeled her stool about, and turned the leaves of the book before her. "I will play Opus X. for you," she said.

This was about as intelligible to Maggie as if she had expressed her intention in terms of the Hebrew *Cabala*. Not knowing what else to say, she asked the composer's name. Miss Graham stared at her, as if she had asked the name of the ruling president.

"Beethoven, of course," was the brief reply.

"Oh!" Maggie felt a little chagrined, and sought relief by moving to another chair. Her eyes fell on

a portrait of the master, hanging above the piano. "That is Beethoven, isn't it?" she asked. "And wasn't something the matter with him? Wasn't he blind or something?"

Miss Graham took out her handkerchief and rubbed her nose vigorously, a habit she had when her feelings were tried. "It was Milton that was blind," she said, with manifest irony. "So was Homer. Perhaps you were thinking of Homer. There wouldn't have been any particular merit in Beethoven's being blind, that I know of. He was only deaf."

"Oh, to be sure!" Maggie perceived the irony; but, although it brought the color to her cheeks, she was not discouraged. "How very hard that must have been," she said, in a rather perfunctory tone. "I wonder he cared to go on composing when he could hear nothing of what he had written."

Miss Graham wheeled sharply towards her. "Why not? Do you suppose he carried his soul in his ears?"

"No, of course not," Maggie replied humbly. "I know you think me very stupid." The owner of the portrait turned back to her instrument, making an unintelligible sound in her throat. She began to play, going through the composition she had selected, in her usual creditable style, Maggie listening attentively.

"That is very pretty, especially the soft part," she said, when the player had finished.

"The soft part!" the other repeated wonderingly. "Oh, you mean the *adagio!*"

"Why is the sweetest music always the saddest?"

Maggie asked. She had apparently not heeded the correction, but stored it in memory and never spoke of the second part of a sonata as the soft part again. She was beginning to see that one form of ignorance may be as bad as another, and the use of correct phraseology as important in the discussion of music as of the weather.

"Why is the saddest music the sweetest?" Miss Graham said, repeating Maggie's question in reverse form. "Because it's the truest — because life is sad — a struggle, a conflict from beginning to end," shutting her lips closely. "That's what Beethoven found it. Do you suppose he could have written such music if he had never known trial or sorrow?"

"No, I suppose not," replied Maggie thoughtfully, though this was a kind of reasoning she held in great dislike. "Certainly he overcame very great obstacles," she added, somewhat tritely.

"You mean his deafness? I don't believe he ever thought of it as an obstacle," Miss Graham replied, wilfully turning about from her former line of argument. "Of course, it was a trial; but he had to go on writing his music, as he had to go on breathing."

"You mean that he had the idea of the music, and it was impossible not to express it, whether he could hear it or not. I think I understand; and I've no doubt that musical ideas are as good as any other, if I could only make them out."

"They're a good deal better," was the quick reply; but Maggie grew a little contrary here, and said she did not see why.

"Because they're bigger, — as feeling is always larger than thought. The ideas music deals with are generic, not specific. Do you know what I mean by that?" fixing a piercing glance on her listener.

"Ye — es," Maggie said hesitatingly. "You mean they are more inclusive, not so well defined." As for feeling being larger than thought, she did not find it difficult to understand that. She had known some feelings that covered a good deal of space.

"Very good. Music expresses general sentiments, not cut-and-dried ideas. Schumann's *Abendlied* presents you with an image of the peaceful close of day, of calm and restful twilight, —

> "'Where the quiet end of evening smiles,
> Miles on miles,'"

quoting her favorite, and a much-abused poet, "but it doesn't tell you what day of the month it is, nor whether the moon is in her second or third quarter. You may listen a good while before music will tell you what road John Smith took when he went courting Susan Brown, the color of her hair or the shape of his hat; but it is music that brings the whole thing before you like a picture. You can see it all: the moonlight on the trees, and the shadow of the long well-sweep in the yard. You can even smell the honeysuckles on the porch, and see the silly young couple hanging over the gate; only it's no longer John and Susan, you know, but the whole race of lovers from Hero and Leander down. Music deals with the universal. It is not its office to particularize."

"If I were Susan, I should be glad it wasn't," said Maggie demurely. It struck her as very amusing that Miss Graham should have struck just this kind of illustration. The latter looked at her.

"I suppose the Lord knows why he made women so narrow-minded," she said resignedly. "They never can get beyond the personal view of anything."

Maggie laughed. "Don't you like women, either?" she inquired. "I thought it was men you disliked."

"So I do; but there are times when I grow reconciled to them. I know of but one young woman who can look at a subject logically, as a man does, and keep herself out of it, and yet not want to domineer over the whole of creation like a man: and that's your sister Helen."

"Oh, Helen!" Maggie spoke in quiet resignment, dropping her cheek on her hand.

"She's the most sensible young woman I know. You ought to be proud of her."

"Do you mean I ought to try to be like her?"

"You couldn't do better. There can never be too many Helen Deans in the world."

"But, in the mean time, there's one Maggie Dean. What am I to do with her? She's a very insignificant person, I know; but I can't help thinking she has a few rights and privileges."

"She'd better not think too much about her rights and privileges. Tell her to come and hear me play, and develop all the gifts she has."

"I see," said Maggie, with a lugubrious smile, "you want me to cultivate Helen's missing talent. Then you'll piece my one virtue on to hers and so get a perfect character. Well," with a sigh, "I don't know but that would be easier than trying to develop a perfect character of my own."

"Don't talk like that," said the older woman. "If there's anything I dislike, it's the morbid way young people talk of themselves nowadays. You'd think they'd compassed all of Solomon's wisdom and Job's suffering before they're nineteen. It's your business to make the most of yourself. Margaret Fuller said, 'The chief business in life is to grow.' You ought to join the Emerson Class."

"But what is the growing for?" Maggie asked perversely. "I don't like people who are always fussing over themselves, whether for their mind's sake or anything else. I get so tired," she added, rising and stretching out her arms, "of all this talk about growth and self-improvement, always getting ready for something that never happens. As though we were not as much alive to-day as we shall be to-morrow. Why shouldn't we live as we go along?"

"Poor child, if it's living you want, you're likely to get enough of it," Miss Graham murmured; but Maggie was moving restlessly about the room, and did not hear her.

"Why should I join the Emerson Class?" she asked impatiently. "I hate dividing my time like a patchwork quilt for the sake of matching the pieces. I like to have new things happen."

"You've got a very ill-regulated mind; I can see that. I should never think you were Helen Dean's sister."

"I am tired of being Helen Dean's sister," Maggie replied, dropping her cheek on her hand. "Not that I want Helen to die," she added demurely.

"I should think not. Your sister has one of the most systematic minds I know. I'll warrant she can get up in the dark and put her hand on anything she wants; but I don't believe you can."

"No, but I know where the matches are."

She came forward and stood leaning on the piano, her slim young figure clearly outlined against the wall.

"I don't want to join the Emerson Class, but I'll tell you what I would like to do. I should like to study music."

"Do you mean that you want to take lessons?" the other asked, in some dismay.

"Oh, dear! no. What is the use of my spending months and years trying to do something you can do so much better for me already?" There was a cunning flattery in this, that had its effect. "I mean I should like to come and hear you play until I have learned what it is that Beethoven and all the rest mean. If it is the universal that music teaches, I think I shall like it. It sounds so large and splendid. There isn't anything in particular you have to remember, like names and dates. Will you let me come?"

"Yes, I'll let you," was the dry response; "but,

mind, I don't expect you. You'll be tired of it by to-morrow."

"Oh, no, I think not," said Maggie gravely, "not before a fortnight. Are you going to play the John and Susan piece now?" she asked, as Miss Graham began turning the leaves of the book. The latter answered shortly that she was not, explaining, when she had found what she wanted, that it was a piano arrangement of a composition written in honor of Napoleon, but afterwards, when the composer learned that the rising apostle of liberty had accepted the emperor's crown, given a new title, "*L'Eroica*." "It's a tribute to the hero in general," Miss Graham went on: "the heroic type, you know. You generally have to leave out most of the living examples when you're after the type. We might call it — let me see — the triumph of duty," turning a meaning look on her companion.

"Very well," said Maggie tranquilly. "I believe in duty. All I object to is the theory that it is necessarily unpleasant. I believe happiness is a duty, and I think that is what the music will say. — I suspect that is what music is for, to help us see things as we should like to have them."

"If that is what you are coming to hear me play for, I forbid it now," said the other, regarding her frowningly above her spectacles. "I won't be a party to any such demoralization." Maggie laughed and looked mutinous.

"Go and sit down somewhere out of sight," the musician ordered. "I never want any one to look at

me when I play," and Maggie went obediently and seated herself on the other side of the room.

This was the beginning of a growing intimacy between these two people. Maggie went often to hear Miss Graham play, and the good effects of this new acquaintance soon began to manifest themselves. It was not long before she understood what her friend meant when she said that musical ideas were larger than others. As she listened to the flow of harmonious sounds evoked from the old piano, she seemed to have gained entrance to a new world, where truth, freed from the didactic bonds of special formula and text, is presented in the form of vivid emotion. Sometimes music transported her into a realm of pure and ecstatic being, such as freed angels only can retain permanent possession of; at other times it saddened her inexpressibly, like the requiem of an ever-moving creation that "groaneth and travaileth in pain;" but with sensitive souls the main office of music is always the same, ennobling the heart and exalting the imagination.

In her reflections on this new acquaintance, Miss Graham was obliged to disentangle some troublesome thoughts.

"Where did those girls get their superior refinement and intelligence," she asked herself, "with a railroad machinist for a father, and a woman like Amanda Weatherby for a mother? It wears my brains out thinking about it. I wish the scientists would stop laying down their new-fangled laws about heredity and all that, until they're able to explain the excep-

tions. If I am to believe in a new theory at all, I like to go ahead and believe in it, and not be continually apologizing my way through it. It's like knitting a stocking and stopping every moment to pick up a lost stitch."

Then it occurred to her that a good way to pick up this stitch might be to cultivate a nearer acquaintance with the senior members of the Dean family.

She suddenly developed a habit of dropping in there in an accidental way, first to bring a book for Helen, or to leave a message, then from no apparent motive but neighborly interest and good will. She talked with Mrs. Dean about household matters, and helped her stripe the new rag carpet she was getting ready for the weaver; invited herself to supper, and drew out her host on the convenient subject of the strikes. The older members of the household came to regard her with growing favor.

"She's got more sense than I supposed," Mrs. Dean said, after one of these visits. "Her head's got something besides books in it. She knows pretty near as much about dye-stuffs as I do. She wants me to try her rule for apple butter, and I don't know but I will. I hate to 'pear unaccommodatin'."

When she came to sum up the results of these visits, Miss Graham, with that peculiar relish for self-anathematization which natures like hers have, told herself she had been a fool. "As though it wasn't native wit and goodness that one generation inherits from another, rather than any acquired virtue or accomplishment, like a knowledge of French or

china-painting; the tendency to a certain type of character, rather than the results. That man is one of the gentlest, bravest souls I know. He's living in a world that's too big for him, and has been hungry all his life. You can tell that by the way he looks at you, like a dog that can't speak. He is a poet, too." It was natural, now that she had started on the subject, she should rhapsodize a little over it. "He doesn't write out his poetry, as Parson Fay does, and print it, for his women parishioners to cry over and paste in their scrap-books; but he's got it inside, just the same. And that's what makes the only real suffering in this world, having to keep things inside that want to come outside," relieving her own interior burden with a sigh. "That man has had his doubts to wrestle with, as well as the rest of us; only he hasn't cultivated himself up to the point of making a merit of it, and would have to get me to explain it to him. And I guess I could explain it, if anybody could," shutting her lips together. "I've wrestled myself — some; and not always with an angel, either."

"Then, there's the mother," she began again. "She's by no means so bad. She's efficient and intelligent, up to her need. Thinks pretty well of herself, but I suppose she would say the same of me. But you won't catch her aiming any higher than she can hit. She doesn't think she ought to rule in the White House because she can make her husband's shirts. She sticks to what she knows, and lives in the concrete world of three meals a day and a clean

table-cloth on Wednesdays. Hegel's doctrine of 'pure being' wouldn't interest her much, but I think she'd understand what Fichte meant by the Absolute Ego; and I suppose Wednesday is as good a day to change the table-cloth as any."

Miss Graham's interest in the Dean family was now firmly established. Maggie was hardly aware of the extent to which she had surrendered to this new influence in her life. She behaved in her usual manner, and continued to criticise and oppose Miss Graham in many ways; but new ideas and motives were at work within her, the results of which were likely to be all the more genuine that they were only half recognized by herself. Maggie was but dreamily aware of this changing sentiment within, shaping to new forms many of the old thoughts and desires. Life would never be to her the serious affair it was to Helen. There was not a trace of mysticism in Maggie, nor of that generalizing faculty which needs to adjust correctly the belts of Saturn before sweeping the front steps. Her metaphysical conception of the universe was very dim, and she was content to let it remain so. It was the world of human life and action which interested her most. The work of teaching in which she was engaged had proved a happier means of occupation than she had expected; and she had the satisfaction of knowing she was accomplishing a needed service, considerably beyond anything required by the letter of the contract which had placed her in her present position.

She had rebelled at the outset against the stiff

formalism of the reigning methods, while the rows of lifeless pupils before her aroused her sympathy and kindled her ambition. The principle she always defended, that, other things being equal, the pleasantest way of doing a thing is the best, was brought into play in the schoolroom, and, assisted by some books Miss Graham recommended, she introduced several new features into her work, with immediate good effect on herself and her pupils. She was young and pretty enough to command their willing admiration from the first, and when she began to vary the regular lessons with new marching and gymnastic exercises, and to reward their good behavior with a chapter from Miss Alcott, they were ready to fall down and worship her.

Miss Graham watched her young friend's course with approval which she did not hesitate to give generous expression to elsewhere, but was careful to qualify with a few captious remarks when in Maggie's presence. Finding little to complain of in the result of Maggie's efforts, she set to work to find something deficient in her motives.

"It will amount to nothing, your clay-modelling and the rest, unless you work from the right principle," she said, one afternoon when the two sisters had dropped in after school. "Besides, you are not serious enough in it. You ought to go to the city and take a thorough course of instruction in the Froebel Institute, if you mean to make it your life-work."

"I'm sure I don't know whether it's my life-work or not," said Maggie, leaning carelessly back in her chair.

"There, now! I thought so! That's the trouble with young women nowadays. They have no constancy of purpose."

"I should think that applied to Helen more than to me," Maggie replied, with a teasing look at her sister, which brought a warm flush to the latter's cheek. "It is not I who am about to desert the high and sacred cause of book-keeping."

"Your sister's case is very different."

"Yes, I know," was the laughing reply. "John Norton is a favorite, and holds the most improved views on the subject of plenary inspiration." These words had a saucy sound, addressed to one so much older; but they were atoned for by the bright, laughing glance which accompanied them, Maggie at the same time reaching out her hand, with a pretty gesture of deprecation, and laying it softly on her friend's arm.

"I don't say a young woman shouldn't marry, if she thinks enough of a man, and he's the right sort; but you understand, as well as I do, the motives that prompt most girls in the selection of a husband, — the wish to have an establishment of their own, or to avoid being a disagreeable old maid like me. Such girls care nothing about their work, and take up with anything that offers itself, until some man comes along" —

"Now you are unjust, I think," Maggie interrupted; she tried to smile and speak in her usual manner, but she had shown signs of growing uneasiness during these last remarks, and now rose from

her seat, and said they must go. Miss Graham did not notice her embarrassment, but Helen did, and wondered if she were thinking of Henry Parsons; but Maggie's disturbance had a cause her sister was not instructed in

CHAPTER XVII.

PASSING EVENTS.

MAGGIE'S work in the schoolroom was watched with mingled envy and admiration by her associate teachers, a few of whom began to copy her methods and enter into friendly co-operation with her. The principal held himself aloof, with an air of doubtful wisdom, and kept a sharp lookout for the reports, at the same time that he fell into the habit of bringing visitors to No. 6, which was rapidly becoming the show-room of the building.

Among the school's most frequent visitors was Judge Foster, chairman of the board of directors, whose name had long been identified with the educational interests of the town. It was he who had sought an introduction to Maggie on the day of her graduation, and praised her essay. When she applied for a place as teacher, he showed a pleased remembrance of her, and exerted himself to procure her success. He had been from the first a sympathetic observer of her efforts to improve the time-honored methods of her predecessors, lending his official sanction to many experiments the other directors regarded with indifference. The presence of the dignified-looking judge was becoming familiar to the pupils,

and Maggie felt an excusable pride in her influential ally.

Judge Foster was a widower of several years' standing, whose domestic life had been further disturbed by the wild courses of an only son, whom Bertha Fay had held up in unfavorable contrast with Henry Parsons, when discussing the question of social eligibility with her father. Maggie had read in his manner only a paternal feeling for herself, and a desire to assist in the laudable object of elevating the educational standards of Litchfield.

Absorbed in her work, and pleasantly convinced of her own growing usefulness in it, a young woman may go far towards forgetting she is a young woman; and when some unlooked-for event or circumstance suddenly recalls such knowledge, the feeling aroused is oddly compounded of flattered vanity and disappointment.

The chairman of the board had dropped in late one afternoon; and after listening with approving attention to the recitation in geography, and watching the pupils march in orderly ranks from the room, he remained to chat a few moments with the teacher. This was not an unusual thing. Maggie liked talking with this intelligent and elderly friend, in whose presence she felt as free as in her father's. She listened to his praise of her work with a gratified countenance, and followed up the privilege it bestowed by preferring a request that had been lying unspoken in her mind a long time. She explained a new method she wished to introduce in the geography lessons, but which

would necessitate the purchase of a set of raised maps. Maggie had made similar requests of the board before, through this same medium, and put this one with the easy and rather assured air of one who feels confident of a favorable response.

"Well, we must see about it," the judge replied. He spoke with a pre-occupied air, which Maggie, busy putting her desk in order, did not observe, and stood looking at her with a contemplative expression.

"There have been a good many complaints lately about expenditures," he went on abstractedly. "We must be a little careful. It's drawing near election, you know; and we office-seekers have to think about our records," smiling a little.

"I thought the people elected directors to attend to the schools," said Maggie, with youthful pertness, shutting her desk and leaning back in her chair.

"Ostensibly," the judge replied, looking at her admiringly. "But the schools are a subject of secondary interest to the average director. His mind is more apt to be concerned with the coming primaries."

"Then, I am glad there is one who is not an 'average director,'" was the quick reply. Maggie said this with the fearless candor of a child. The judge's gray-whiskered countenance flushed with pleasure.

"Thank you, but I'm afraid I've been overdoing it a little. They're beginning to find fault, and talk of dropping me. They say I'm extravagant, and accuse me of — of favoritism." He paused, and threw a conscious look at her.

"Talk of dropping you!" Maggie exclaimed, un-

heeding his last words, and dismayed at the thought of losing her strongest ally. "What a shame! It ought to be prevented. We will get up a petition. I will start it myself."

"Oh, things have not gone so far as that, but you are very kind," with growing impressiveness of tone and look. "Only, if I were to say anything about the raised maps just now"—

"Let them go," Maggie generously interrupted, "I can wait. But I never heard of anything so mean—after all you have done for the schools." Another glow of pleasure spread over her listener's face, and he repeated that she was very kind. Leaning forward on the desk, he spoke in a lower and confidential tone. "You shall have the maps," he said, "I will get them for you myself. You shall have anything you want."

Some subtile change passed over the man with these words, which affected Maggie unpleasantly; and a confused feeling of fear and rising distrust crept over her, but was partly dissipated as her visitor again began to speak of her work, renewing his praise and promises of assistance. She could not have told just where these words of official commendation began to assume a nearer and more personal meaning. The discovery of the speaker's changing intent and manner came slowly, and gave rise, at first, only to a stupefied incredulity. It seemed to Maggie as if her senses must be deceiving her in some way. She sat there in a cold chill, the smile frozen on her lips, seeming to encourage what she was listening to. At last, there

was no room for doubt. Her visitor had ceased all talk about raised maps and the schoolroom, and was speaking of herself — Maggie Dean. He was asking her to marry him; and, in anticipation of her reply, was reaching out his hand to take hers. She sprang from her seat, as if breaking through some fearful spell, and cut his words short.

"Oh, hush!" she exclaimed. "Don't say it — you don't mean it, I am sure."

He looked at her in bewilderment. Evidently, he had not expected this, and he began a fatuous protest.

"I beg you will not say another word," said Maggie severely. "It is not to be thought of — I wonder at you." In spite of herself, these last words of astonished reproof would escape. She stepped quickly to a closet and took out her hat and shawl, hurriedly putting them on. Her cheeks tingled, and her heart beat a frightened tattoo, urging her to escape.

"What do you mean?" her visitor asked, with a touch of anger, still standing by the desk, to which Maggie was obliged to return for her keys. "That I am too old to marry? — fifty-seven is not so old."

Maggie shuddered and shrank away from him. There seemed reason. Under the double effect of misdirected passion and offended self-love, the worthy judge's appearance was anything but re-assuring. His stately figure had a limp, half-craven look, as he stood leaning against the desk, while a silly, shame-faced expression rested on his counte-

nance. It was as if the whole man had suddenly dropped to a lower level through the inward relaxation of some moral fibre, so that he appeared of decreased size and stature. Maggie looked at him in shocked surprise. Was this the friend she had looked up to for advice and guidance, whose help she had been so proud of! But most human greatness has its moments of imbecility.

"Do you mean to say you prefer the drudgery of the schoolroom to the life I can give you?" he asked, with weak boastfulness. "You are different from most young women, then."

"Perhaps I am," Maggie replied, trembling with excitement. "Other young women must decide for themselves. I know I would rather die than do such a thing."

She spoke with the intensity of a conviction sprung into full being at a bound, and was a little surprised at her own earnestness. She had never dreamed of the horrors of a certain kind of marriage until its possibility was thus unexpectedly thrust on her.

"Your head is full of a girl's romantic notions," her persistent suitor replied, "but I can tell you that a marriage like ours stands a better chance of happiness than half the young folks'."

"Never speak of it again!" Maggie cried, turning sharply away.

The words "a marriage like ours" seemed already to have consummated the dreadful event they described, and a new alarm and repugnance filled her.

It was as if the man had seized and forcibly drawn her towards him.

With lifted head and proud, set face, she moved towards the door, but there her insulted dignity was forced to pause. She was obliged to let her visitor pass through first, that she might close and lock the door. He followed slowly after, with a sulky and defeated look; but, within a few paces of her, he stopped and seemed to collect himself. The next moment, the old natural dignity of mien had returned, and his face had nearly recovered its usually grave and sensible expression. He seemed to have called to halt the retreating forces of his manhood, and stood before her the courteous, intelligent gentleman she had known before.

"I am sorry to have disturbed you," he said, with an old-time wave of the hat he carried in his hand. "I made a mistake, and beg your pardon." He made a gesture of farewell, and would have passed her, but Maggie, taken by surprise in a new direction, stepped towards him. A generous impulse came over her, and she was no longer afraid of him.

"Oh, sir, do not be angry with me. You have always been so good to me. I know it is a great honor, but I — I could never think of it," ending in helpless climax.

That "sir," dropped falteringly and in a tone of timid respect, showed the judge, more than anything else, how hopeless had been the little dream he had cherished.

"Pray, forget all about it," he said, in a polite tone,

deprecating her further interest in the matter. "I will see what I can do about the maps. Good-afternoon;" and with another old-fashioned wave of the hand he passed by her and left the building.

Left alone, Maggie went back to her desk and shed a few excited tears. Now and afterwards, when she reflected on what had happened, she could not but wonder a little at herself. Like most girls, she had more than once speculated on the subject of a mercenary marriage, and in imagination had not found it difficult to lead the kind of life that had been offered her, full of luxuries and opportunities she had always coveted, purchased by quiet acquiescence on her part. Now she noted with surprise how deep and strong had been her recoil from it. She could not account for this feeling. She only knew it was very real.

Our imagination dupes us in many ways. We are neither so good and wise, on the one hand, nor so wicked and foolish, on the other, as dream-fed fancy often pictures us. Opportunity to commit the ill deed whose fruits we covet brings an illuminating force all its own, that shocks us back from actual performance. Maggie was profiting by the stimulating discovery that she was better than she thought. Yet she did not tell herself she had done anything very fine or heroic in rejecting an offer of marriage from the wealthy and influential judge. On the contrary, and herein lay the surprise, she had done the only possible thing to do. There had been no room for a moment's debate on the subject, and all regret was

lost in a feeling of happy escape. Would that always be her feeling? she wondered, for naturally Maggie did not suppose this offer was to be her last. She remembered this had not been her precise state of mind when Henry Parsons had pressed the same subject on her attention; but that, she said, without entering into minute examination of the subject, was very different.

Maggie had lately begun to harbor a slight feeling of regret when she thought of Henry Parsons, but she did this in what she believed a perfectly defensible way. It was the lost friend she regretted, not the lover. That eminently safe conclusion established, it became permissible to think about him sometimes. There seemed plenty of evidence to herself and others that Maggie was not in a lovelorn condition. Her step was as light, her smile as frank and merry, as in the old days when she and Bertha used to walk to school together. The color of healthy youth glowed in her countenance. She seemed at this time wholly and happily occupied in the present, indulging no useless regrets for the past nor sentimental longings for the future. She continued to hear about Henry Parsons through Helen's letters, and more ambitious epistolary efforts published in the *Gazette*, which referred to its correspondent as "our former esteemed citizen."

Report said the son of Tim Parsons, of despised memory, was doing very well. He had joined his brains to another man's capital, and the two were doing a neat little business in real estate. Two or three of the moneyed men in his native village, among

them Mr. Danvers, had been induced to venture in some of the new firm's enterprises, to the benefit of all concerned, so that the young lawyer was coming to be something of an authority on certain subjects among his former townsmen. Sometime, Maggie reflected impartially, they would hear the news of his marriage. He would bring his wife to Litchfield, and she had often rehearsed her own part in such an event, her treatment of the new-comer, which was to be most sisterly and kind. She had abandoned the fleeting idea of a union between Henry Parsons and her sister, for the practical reason, before hinted at, that Helen was engaged to some one else.

Events had slowly ripened since the winter's night a year ago when she saw the two moonlit figures from her window. The story of Helen Dean's courtship had flowed smoothly along from the beginning. So far as external signs went, John Norton and his betrothed might have been taken for a pair of earnest friends rather than lovers; their interest in each other having been founded from the first on that intellectual sympathy which friendship knows it cannot do without, but which love, unhappily, often tries to.

A character like John Norton's is best typified in the calm sunshine of late summer, which neither dazzles nor burns, but holds a ripening quality, and power of radiating life and cheer all its own. With his even balance of healthful faculties, sound intellect, and genial manners, springing from an unspoiled heart, the young minister was regarded by his friends as nearly a perfect character. Outwardly, he was of

pleasing, though not marked, appearance. A figure little above medium height, looking somewhat taller, and with a suggestion of physical delicacy, a frank blue eye, reddish brown hair and beard, and a winning smile made up his most noticeable characteristics. He was a man who made friends wherever he went, yet never made use of them for personal ends. His own resources were limitless, and to those who had learned to depend on him he seemed born to the task of human helpfulness.

He had chosen a profession that remands most of its followers to the difficult side of things. Born into the denomination in which he now held the place of ordained minister, religious growth had been with him almost as simple and natural a process as that of the body. He had but opened his being on all sides to receive whatever light of truth or spiritual blessing the universe contains. A sincere, natural piety pervaded all his teachings, unmarred by weak sentiment, and supported by a mental poise that kept him quietly faithful to his chosen ideals of belief and conduct day by day.

"I've only one fault to find with John Norton," Miss Graham said to Maggie, during the latter's early acquaintance with him, "and that is, that he is so little of an enthusiast."

"You mean so little of a fanatic?" Maggie asked correctingly. As this was about what the older woman did mean, though she did not wish to say so, she scowled.

"You may call it 'fanatic' if you want to. That

is the usual reward people get in this world who are in downright earnest. But there's another one coming. Do you remember that line of Mrs. Browning's? —

"'Earth's fanatics oftentimes make heaven's saints.'"

"Dear me! what an easy road to sainthood!" said Maggie, with girlish satire. "I am glad Mr. Norton has chosen another. I suppose you are disappointed because he will not settle down in Litchfield and take charge of a liberal society here."

Miss Graham made an inarticulate murmur of mixed assent and deprecation. "Of course, I know there are difficulties in the way," she said.

"I should think there were," Maggie replied. "The chief difficulty is that the liberal society doesn't exist."

"It never will," the other retorted sharply, "if no one has the courage to make a beginning. A man must have enough missionary zeal to save fifty Indias in order to make an impression on a town like this," she added inconsistently.

"Litchfield isn't one of the fields white for harvest," Maggie lazily commented. "I suppose Greenville is." This was the name of the place Norton had received an invitation to settle in. "For my part, I like Mr. Norton all the better because he is so little of a partisan. He is a firm believer in Unitarianism, but he doesn't seem in the least anxious to make me one."

"I suppose you think you are an Episcopalian," said her hostess dryly.

Maggie made no direct reply to this, reflecting a little. Then she said, with mock impressiveness, "I am like Emerson, — 'I'm a seeker.'"

"If that's the case, you'd better look up the history of Henry the Eighth."

"Don't you think that is a rather old story about Henry the Eighth?"

"Not so old as the story of the fall of man."

"But you don't believe that, you know." Maggie laughed. "Even Mr. Norton says the Episcopal Church is very broad — in England, it represents the finest culture and scholarship."

"In England, perhaps. In Litchfield it stands for Mr. Fay and all kinds of social snobbery. Now, I happen to know that John Norton has the same opinion of the Apostles' Creed that I have, only he doesn't say so."

"That is not because he is afraid to," Maggie hastily answered, already in sufficient liking for her new friend to defend him. "It is because his way of looking at things is different from some liberals'. What he likes best is to find the points of likeness between two opposing views, and not the points of difference. I'm sure that is much more amiable."

"Oh, amiable!" the other exclaimed impatiently. "It would be more amiable in me, I suppose, to spend my time trying to decide, with my neighbor Brown, on the invisible line that shall keep his cow from coming over into my yard and trampling down my currant bushes; but I prefer to build a board fence. That settles the question, and saves my currants.

Polly, I wish you wouldn't interrupt," she ended, to the green-and-yellow torment in its cage near by, who, inspired by the long and rather excited discourse of her mistress, entered into the conversation with a shrill cackle. Maggie went towards the bird and addressed it some words of pretended comfort.

"Poor Polly! Why don't you get Miss Graham to make you a cap, Polly?" in allusion to the bald headpiece of that ancient fowl, and spoken in a teasing accent that the bird understood, if not the words, ruffling its feathers and pecking at the speaker through the bars of the cage.

"Fie, Polly! I'm sorry you have such a bad temper. And analogy isn't always good argument, Polly."

"Polly and I are often called bad-tempered," said her owner, "because we don't know how to show our injured feelings gracefully. If we did, people would only praise us for our sensitive temperament. Analogy is as good an argument as any other when people want to be convinced. I'm not saying anything against John Norton. Breadth of view is a desirable virtue, I suppose, though I've never hankered after it as much as some people. I prefer distinctness of vision any time. I like to see the thing that lies right before my eyes, and I've noticed that the people who are after the big horizons generally miss that little virtue."

Helen's family could form but faint conjecture on her relation to this new acquaintance when he was first presented to them; but that it was one of rapidly progressing understanding may be inferred from the

fact that, on his third visit, he asked for a son's place among them. The frank, upright nature of the man never appeared to better advantage than at this time. John Norton had the perfect manners that spring from unselfishness and a genuine interest in those about him. He had to overcome no feeling of strangeness or embarrassment with Helen's parents, for the simple reason that he felt none; and this is but to add that very soon they came to feel none either. Thomas Dean may have inclined at first to look upon his proffered son-in-law with distant respect, bordering on dread, but this feeling soon melted into gratified liking and trust. Mrs. Dean regarded him with a little preliminary suspicion, intent, here as elsewhere, on preserving her independence; but she soon grew ashamed of this feeling, and came to hold her daughter's plighted husband in open admiration.

Maggie was not at home when the news of her sister's engagement was broken. She had been spending the evening with a friend, and it was late when she entered the house to find Mr. Norton there. He was standing with Helen, near the table, on the opposite side of which her father and mother sat. An expectant air hung over the little group, that arrested Maggie's attention, and she involuntarily paused inside the door. A look of flushed happiness and pride overspread her father's face, and her mother also seemed agitated, though she tried to hide it in the brisk play of her knitting-needles. Helen looked gravely happy. Her lover had evidently just stopped speaking. Maggie darted a rapid glance round the little circle, wonder-

ing if she was expected to withdraw, when her father spoke to her.

"Come here, my little girl." She went up to him, and he placed his arm about her, seeming to derive some needed support in this way. It was difficult to address the two before him, so he turned to her. "Mr. Norton has asked Helen to be his wife. What shall we say to him?"

Maggie hesitated a moment, and her eyes looked searchingly into those of the young man.

"Helen ought to answer first, I think. She is older than I." A smile went round the circle and relieved the tension. Helen slipped round to her father's side, who released Maggie to rise and give her a kiss of paternal blessing. She had to bend down to take her mother's, who would not acknowledge the tear glittering on her cheek, by brushing it away, and vigorously resumed her knitting the next moment.

"Kiss your sister, Maggie," her father said, but before this John Norton had stepped forward and taken her hand.

"I have always wanted a sister," he said, smiling down at her. Maggie looked thoughtfully up at him.

"Helen will tell you I don't make a very good one," she replied.

"No, she won't," was the confident answer. "Nobody shall say that of a sister of mine, — not even Helen."

Maggie liked this, and flashed a bright smile at him, then lifted her face to receive the salute her new relationship had earned.

"O Helen! I am sure you will be very happy, because you deserve to," she cried, throwing her arms about her sister.

They all laughed at this. "Looks as if Maggie'd found out why she ain't over-happy herself," her mother said. "Well, I never thought I should want one o' my girls to marry a minister," she added, a moment after. "Give me a man that's learned a trade, and knows how to earn a day's livin', I've always said; but I'm free to own it looks diff'rent now. I guess it ain't so much the minister as it is the man."

The minister appeared to enjoy this. "Certainly the man ought to count first," he said.

"Yes, that's true," said Thomas Dean, bringing his hand slowly down on the arm of his chair. "The man had ought to count first." He spoke with deep-toned emphasis and careful deliberation, as if he had originated the remark himself, and seemed to ponder it deeply afterward. Thoughts were so much easier to Thomas Dean than words.

Maggie had liked John Norton from the first, and the relation now established between them promised to become the source of much happiness and profit. Maggie was one with whom the personal relations of life predominate above all other influences. An agreeable companion, some one she liked and could talk to freely, was more to her than a world of books. Apparently she was always surrounded with admirers, yet, since her separation from Bertha Fay, she had had no intimate companion or confidant, unless Miss Graham could be counted such. Maggie

contrasted John Norton with Mr. Fay, and said the former was the most perfect gentleman she knew; then, sensible of the inadequacy of this praise, she added that he was the best man. He was good without being tiresome, a rare accomplishment in Maggie's eyes. He was always entertaining, could be wise when he chose, and was never silly, as wise people often are when they try to make themselves agreeable. Moreover, this new acquaintance had made a snug, warm place for her in his brotherly heart, all her own, independent of any other relation. She talked more freely with this friendly confessor than with any one else, seeking his counsel, and revealing the strange medley of contradictory impulses, hopes, and longings which fill a young girl's heart. John Norton seemed to understand her, she said, with that pensive injury we all cherish at times against a cold and uncomprehending world. That did not mean he always agreed with her, only that he took her on trust and for what she was. Her nature played as freely in his as a happy child in the blossoming fields. Profiting by his wider experience and trained judgment, she was left free to follow her own best interior prompting. In a word, Maggie was her natural self in this new friend's company, a condition that meets the needs of the growing spirit more nearly than we know.

"Do you think I ought to join the Emerson Class?" she asked him, one day, when he had overtaken her on her way from school, and was walking home with her.

"There wouldn't be any 'ought' in my case," he

replied. "I should welcome every chance of contact with that great, enlightened soul."

"Oh, but they stopped studying Emerson ages ago. Of course, I like Emerson too," defensively, and determined not to fall short of her newly acquired standards. "Only I don't pretend to understand the metaphysical essays. I like the essay on 'Manners' better than that on 'The Over-soul.'"

"That's natural — at your age," smiling down at her. He liked, with his thirty years, to assume an older brother's superiority now and then, "and likely to be of more benefit," he added teasingly.

Maggie laughed, and said she supposed so. "I've never thought it made any difference whether I joined or not," she began again, "but now" —

"But now your conscience is pricking you a little."

"It isn't my conscience," Maggie replied irritably. "It's Miss Graham's. Somebody ought to get up a new invention by which people can be made to consume their own consciences."

Her listener was amused at this, but did not agree. "That kind of consumption is too easy already," he said. "What is the matter with Miss Graham?"

"She is in perfect despair because Helen is going away. She hasn't asked me to take her place, but I know what she is thinking about. It's the way she refrains from asking me that provokes me. She thinks me so insignificant."

"Oh, I think not," her companion replied soothingly.

"Yes, she does," Maggie retorted, with a little heat.

"She says I have no great purpose in life. What if I haven't?" lifting her eyes with a defiant flash to his.

John Norton still looked a little amused; then this expression changed, and he pulled thoughtfully at his beard.

"You probably make a different use of the word 'great.' Any purpose in life is great enough that is a just and necessary one, and gives our natures full scope. One need not be a moral Alexander, weeping for more worlds to conquer."

"That is what I think," said Maggie approvingly. "I am content with very small triumphs in the duty line, myself."

Her listener did not seem so amused at this. "Triumphs of any kind that are too easily won rank little better than failures," he said. "You would not willingly let pass a new opportunity of usefulness."

Maggie flushed a little. "How can I be sure the Emerson Club is a new opportunity of usefulness? And I could never make as good a secretary as Helen. She is always blaming me because I am not like Helen."

"Why not show her you can be Helen's equal as Maggie?" A strange suggestion from a lover, perhaps, but John Norton was not a man who found it necessary to sum up the whole of human perfection in a single specimen, even in his chosen wife. He would as soon have thought of denying the merits of another style of beauty than hers. Maggie shrugged

her shoulders, as at a suggestion impossible to carry out.

"I have heard you say, yourself," she said, tacking her sails to another quarter, "that we make use of many artificial methods in the pursuit of modern culture."

"Very likely," he replied. "All methods become wearisome in time. I know people who think church-going a tiresome process, and I can testify there are times when the minister feels the infliction as much as anybody. But the culture itself need not be artificial. The question of *Cui bono?* is an unsafe one to raise anywhere, and, carried to its logical conclusion, might lead us to doubt the wisdom of lacing our shoes. Things are necessarily mechanical in a world governed by the conditions of time and space, and where we have bodies. We must wait until we are translated into a condition of pure spirit before we can make spontaneity our law of action."

"I wonder if we ever shall be," said Maggie, lifting her eyes to the gray November sky above, and letting her thoughts follow the lead of these last words. "Do you think we have any proof of immortality?" turning suddenly towards him.

"We have the proof that lies alongside the knowledge we are now alive," was the answer. "That fact is as wonderful and difficult to explain as the problem of a future existence can be."

"Does that kind of reasoning satisfy you?" Maggie asked doubtingly.

"Not always," was the frank reply, "nor com-

pletely ever. But I suspect there are some things it was not meant we should have satisfactory knowledge about."

"Miss Graham thinks she has satisfactory knowledge. She believes she has had communications."

"Fancies she believes it. She likes to practise a little self-delusion that way. Not that there is anything essentially bad in the belief. Noble souls have held it in all ages."

"I never could believe it," said Maggie, with youthful fervency of dislike for an unrespected topic. "Nothing would induce me. Miss Graham says that is because I have never suffered. She lays it up against me that nothing very bad has ever happened to me. She says suffering is the purifying flame everybody must pass through. But I told her Helen had never suffered."

"What did she say to that?" These constant, aggrieved allusions to "Helen" amused John Norton a good deal.

"Flatly contradicted herself — said there were some people who didn't need purifying flame. I have promised to let her strike the match when I get ready to mount my funeral pyre."

They had reached the gate, which he opened for her, passing in after her.

"Then, you think I ought to take Helen's place?" she asked, as they walked slowly up the path.

"I think Miss Graham deserves all the help she can get."

"Yes, I suppose so," with a little sigh.

"And in a town like Litchfield, where the tendency to a frivolous and rather vulgar social life overrides every other, it seems to me that every one who sees that, and has a chance to offset it with something better, ought to welcome the opportunity."

"Oh, if you are going to put it on the ground of my moral influence" —

"Why shouldn't I put it there? I don't want to preach to you, little sister, but chiefly because I think you do not need it. You will know what to do."

"Oh, I can see that I shall go into the class and become its most exemplary member," said Maggie, with affected resignation.

They had paused a moment on the little porch to finish their talk.

"What are you two talking about so seriously?" asked Helen, as she opened the door from the inside, and stood smiling at them.

"We were talking about Suttee worship in India," Maggie replied, after they had entered the house, casting a laughing glance at their visitor.

"And whether its abolition is likely to lessen Miss Graham's chances of marrying a missionary and going out there to start a suffrage society," the latter added, meeting Maggie's look with one like it. Helen was mystified, but unconcerned, pronouncing them a pair of giddy young people. She reseated herself at her sewing, her lover taking his place at her side with an air of proprietorship.

Mrs. Dean had risen from her seat in some trepida-

tion at the unexpected entrance of this guest. Young people had a queer way of talking nowadays, she thought. She could not remember any conversations like this and others she had caught disjointed scraps of at any of the husking and paring bees of her youth. She had intended to have a plain supper, made up of the remnant of a loaf of bread left over from Saturday's baking; but now she folded her sewing, and went into the kitchen to make some of her matchless biscuits.

CHAPTER XVIII.

JOYS AND TRIALS.

Miss Graham was highly pleased with the outcome of an acquaintance she herself had brought about, yet felt she had some cause of resentment. Her romantic old heart had been fixed on this engagement ever since she first saw John Norton and Helen Dean together; and many a wily scheme had she perfected to assist their knowledge of each other, and hasten an event which now seemed to have transpired of its own accord.

So natural and unconscious had been the behavior of these young people that Miss Graham had felt herself foiled in every attempt at match-making, and stood ready to pronounce them the most prosaic and insensible young couple she knew, when one day Helen quietly announced their engagement. She pushed up her spectacles and stared at her.

"Well, I give up!" she exclaimed. "If there were ever two people in the world on whom I thought I could depend a little, it was you and John Norton." Helen looked surprised incomprehension at this remark.

"Engaged!" her friend repeated, with a sceptical accent. "Why, you've hardly looked at each other!"

Helen smiled, and began to be enlightened. "We've felt each other," she replied softly.

"Humph! Well, it's the last time I'll ever try my hand at anything of that kind."

"Dear Miss Graham, you shall have all the credit, if there is any," Helen said, taking her hand. "I should never have known him but for you." A deeper light glowed in her eyes as she made this indirect admission of her happiness.

"I only hope you'll never lay it up against me," the older woman answered, with affected crossness. "Of course, you think there never was such a man."

"It was you I first heard praise him."

"That may be, but you can never tell what marriage will do for a man. It makes selfish tyrants of most of them. Don't spoil him, that's all I've got to say. Don't make an Oriental slave of yourself. Let him fetch his own slippers."

"Spoil him — spoil John Norton?" Helen repeated, with an incredulous accent.

"There, now! you're as bad as the rest. What I mean is that a man doesn't marry a woman to make a drudge and loving little simpleton of her, though he lets her settle down into that if she wants to. A man marries for companionship — at least a man like John Norton. When I think of the relation women might hold to their husbands, and compare it with that they are content to hold, a petted doll or an upper servant without wages, I despair of the whole race. Now, John Norton wasn't attracted to you because you have dark hair and a straight nose."

Helen, who had never before reflected on these points of advantage, smiled faintly, and said she hoped not.

"It was because you have a mind — some power of intelligent sympathy with his ideas. He likes to talk to you, and believes you can understand and help him better than any one else. It's your business to see that he keeps on thinking so. When he asks you to help him decide between two subjects for a sermon, don't put him off by telling him you've got to make a sponge cake for supper."

Helen expressed her thanks, and promised to do what she could to realize this difficult friend's expectations. Miss Graham then dropped this tone, rose from her chair, and placed her hands on Helen's shoulders.

"My dear girl, I am glad as I can be. I know you don't mind my little ways. You may kiss me if you like;" and Helen dropped a congratulatory kiss for herself on the faded cheek bent to receive it.

Miss Graham had a little extra sharpness for the young man when she spoke with him.

"Mind you treat her as well as she deserves," she said, frowning at him a little, in anticipative punishment of the marital misdeeds he was likely to fall into. "If you don't, I'll never forgive you for making me take an interest in you. If you care for the best that's in her now — if it's her mind and character you admire, keep on admiring them. That's the secret of most of the unhappy marriages I know; husbands take no pains to bring out the higher qualities of their wives. All they want is a

housekeeper," and John Norton, duly humbled and admonished, also promised to do what he could. Then, with the baseness of their tribe, the lovers told each other all that happened, and gave themselves up to much private amusement over the superfluous advice that had been given them.

"She hopes we'll care as much for each other ten years from now," Helen said smilingly.

"Poor old lady! she's had a rather melancholy time of it, picking up the requisite number of unpleasant facts to support her theories. We must invite her to visit us, if only that her presence may operate as a check to the inevitable tendency to matrimonial indifference." They laughed again; then Helen grew repentant, and said they ought to be ashamed of themselves, and that she was one of the best of women anyway.

The marriage took place shortly after the holidays, for the minister wanted to take a wife with him to the new parish he had accepted. Mrs. Dean was loud in her complaints over this hasty arrangement. It was quite outside her conception of things that a daughter of hers should be married without giving her time to fit her out with the needful supply of sheets and table-cloths, hand-made, and in orderly piles of a dozen each.

Maggie's first feeling was one of youthful interest and excitement over the preparations for the approaching nuptials; but, as the wedding day drew near, a new sense of sisterly loss and loneliness crept over her. She looked about the little chamber, with its

sloping ceiling and dormer window, where she and Helen had slept together so many years, and wondered how it would seem when she was left there alone. There would be no one to disapprove of or criticise her after Helen was gone; but she derived less satisfaction from that reflection than she had sometimes thought she should. She sat watching her sister the day before the wedding, while the latter packed her simple possessions in a new trunk, marked with initials not her own. Sober thoughts filled the mind of each, which they did not try to give expression to, their remarks touching only on the surface of things.

"You ought not to put that silk in first," said Maggie, as Helen began folding a new silk, golden-brown in color. "It will get crushed;" and the latter, who always acted on Maggie's judgment in some things, laid it to one side.

"Shall you wear gloves?" she asked, a moment after. Helen reflected, and said she thought not.

"It doesn't make so much difference with a travelling-dress," Maggie replied consentingly; "and it saves bother with the ring. Suppose Mr. Adams cannot come? Will you get Mr. Fay to perform the ceremony?" Mr. Adams was a friend of John Norton, and brother clergyman of the same denomination, who was expected to arrive with him that evening. Helen replied, with quiet decisiveness, that Mr. Fay's services would not be required in any case. "I do not wish to be married with the church ceremony," she said, in partial explanation.

"Is it because you object to the word 'obey'?" Helen said "Yes," and fortified herself by adding that her lover felt as she did.

"I don't suppose it means anything," said Maggie carelessly.

"Then, that is a good reason for not saying it."

The older sister crossed the room to the bureau, to take a few articles from one of the drawers. Placing them on a chair, she took up the package of letters that had so often irritated Maggie's vision, and held them in her hand a moment.

"I don't know what to do with these," she said, in a doubting tone. Maggie took up a piece of ruching from a box near by, and began to inspect it critically, keeping covert watch of her sister, however.

"I think I will leave them," Helen said at last, dropping the package back into the drawer.

"Then, put them away somewhere, please," Maggie made quick, half-pettish request. "I shall want all the room there is."

There are compensations for most losses, and one not to be despised, in Maggie's opinion, for the enforced separation from her sister, even had she no other motive for getting rid of the letters, was the knowledge that she should have a dressing-bureau to herself.

"You may take care of them for me," Helen replied, in a peculiar tone. "I haven't time now.—That reminds me," she added, "that I received another to-day. I haven't read it yet." She drew a letter from her pocket and tore off the end of the en-

velope. Spreading open the large letter-sheet, she began to read. A rather impatient expression gathered on her face as she hastily scanned the written lines. "I can't stop to read this now," she said. "I'll leave it here with the rest," and carelessly dropped the unfolded sheet in the drawer. Maggie was still intent on the strip of ruching, but she could not resist a remark. It looked worse to keep still than to talk on some topics, she thought.

"That isn't very complimentary to the writer," she said dryly. "I imagine Mr. Parsons's letters must be very useful reading. It seems a pity not to profit by them. I suppose he writes about the wheat crop and Chinese immigration, doesn't he?"

"Not altogether," was the reply, the speaker smiling a little. "But I will leave the letters here — you can read them if you like."

"Thank you," said Maggie, in her most non-committal tone, "but I think I will finish my course in German literature first. I don't want to overdo. You had better let me sew in this ruching for you," she ended, abruptly changing the topic from one she was rather ashamed of falling on to.

"Yes, I wish you would," said Helen, and Maggie knew why. She admired her sister, and looked up to her, — was very proud that a man like John Norton wanted to marry her; but there were a few things that she, Maggie, could do better than Helen.

The latter went out of the room, and Maggie rose to get needle and thread from the bureau. Through ill luck or a nervous trembling of the hand, the needle

fell into the open drawer, lodging itself securely in a crack near the pile of letters, requiring some pains to extricate it. During this operation it was impossible for Maggie to avoid sight of certain lines on the open sheet just under her eyes; and, after all, why should she try so hard not to read them, since she had full permission? The first sentence her eye caught ran like this, — "You have entered the snug enclosure of your own happiness, and have no thought for disappointed wretches outside." No hint in this as to whether or not the Chinese must go; and, in a sudden desire for further information on this or some other topic, Maggie took up the letter and deliberately read it through. "What do you mean by saying you will tell me nothing more about her," the writer went on; "that it will be more for my benefit to stop thinking of this subject? Let my benefit take care of itself. You who have learned what this sort of feeling is, and are about to reap its gains, pay light regard to it in another. Why don't you tell me to refuse food when I am hungry, to give up the natural exercise of my limbs, to stop looking up at the stars, and getting the thought a just God reigns somewhere? You might as well." The paper trembled in Maggie's hands, and an excited color burned in her cheek. She did not now try to stay the sudden, strong desire to read the rest of the letters; and for an hour she sat there, drawing one after another from its envelope, not stopping to replace them, but letting them fall to the floor, where they lay in a loose mass. They were not all of the

same temper, but all bore more or less on a single theme. Some were darkly despondent in tone, others sadly resigned, while a few were imbued with a more heroic spirit, even striving to be cheerful.

Maggie found herself rarely spoken of by name, though there was no letter but contained some allusion, more or less direct, to the writer's loss; and the plain motive underlying the writing of each was the hungry need of news of her.

"Don't think of me as a whining, melancholy fellow who goes about with a long face, and an inward sense he's too good for the world he was born in," he wrote in one. "If you were to ask any of my new friends out here about me, I fancy they would not draw my portrait all in grays and blacks. They would tell you I was one of the lucky ones. The people here are kind to me and trust me. I seem to have made a useful place for myself among them. That, in itself, is a source of a good deal of superficial contentment. I have learned that a man may be monstrously unhappy in the main, yet get a good deal of incidental satisfaction out of things; as if he had put all his fortune into some rare gem he had lost, yet could not help seeing the beauty of the flowers by the wayside, and how good it is to have the sun shine."

In another letter this philosophic spirit had disappeared, and was replaced by one of renewed pain and protest. "Whatever you do, don't praise her to me," he wrote. "It angers me when you say anything against her, but it fills me with despair when you tell

me how good and gentle she is growing. Besides, there's an insufferable arrogance in it I hate, as though there were more need of improvement there than elsewhere. Who are we to blame or praise her?"

Then followed a lame apology for the writer's rudeness, and the letter abruptly ended.

Hearing a footstep on the stairs, Maggie hastily picked up the letters and thrust them into the drawer. Her cheeks wore a deeper flush than before, and she was in a strange tumult of surprised and triumphant feeling, touched with repentant pity. This was what Henry Parsons's letters to Helen had meant. They had but served as a safety-valve to an overcharged heart, whose crowded emotions of love and suffering could not be left continually to revolve about themselves. The gift of affection conveys a high compliment under any circumstances, and the knowledge of a strong, impassioned love, standing faithfully by us in spite of the indifference, even injury, with which we have rewarded it, moves us deeply. It was impossible after this that Maggie's thoughts of her old lover should not be of a gentler order. The knowledge, gained from other sources, that he had entered on a career of growing prosperity and usefulness, in the new community where he lived, gratified her. It did not, however, surprise her. She had always thought well of Henry Parsons, and understood his capabilities. She should like to know who had had a better chance, or right even, to understand him than she, the confidant of his boyish dreams,

his nearest friend and companion. It looked as if the old feeling of ownership was coming back.

Maggie wished she could piece out the knowledge thus gained of this correspondence with a clearer understanding of her sister's part and purpose. What had Helen said about her? Plainly, she had praised her a little. Had she been growing good? Maggie asked herself, with a little mocking smile. She did not know it, and could not credit herself with having tried to. But the kingdom of heaven comes not with observation. It was much to have gained an approving opinion of any kind from Helen.

Perhaps the preparations for Helen's wedding helped to soften Maggie's general ideas on the subjects of love and marriage. Anyway, she carried about with her at this time a feeling of light-hearted happiness. Life seemed both easy and pleasant, and to contain a hint of coming good fulfilment she did not try clearly to define to herself. After Helen's marriage, she entered on her duties, as the only daughter of the household, with a new sense of dignity and responsibility. She had the dressing-bureau to herself, and the independence of her position did much to assuage its loneliness. She kept on with her work in the schoolroom, and just now was unusually busy, preparing for the spring examinations.

It was a raw, windy day in March when Maggie returned from school, face and eyes aglow from contact with the keen air outside, and in good spirits, to have the latter quickly dampened by a sight she had never seen before: her mother sitting ill and helpless before

the stove, trying in vain to warm herself, and drawing a short, sharp gasp of pain with every breath. It was washing-day, and Mrs. Dean, with the reckless security of people who boast themselves in perfect health, had left the steam-filled kitchen to face the cutting winds outside and hang out the clothes, and was now suffering from the incipient stages of pneumonia. That was what the doctor, whom Maggie had hastily sent for, pronounced it, after a grave-faced examination of his patient. Father and daughter, listening to this verdict, looked at each other in dumb stupor. It was the first case of real sickness in the house since Maggie had the measles; and the fact that it had struck at the most active and capable one among them, the mother and faithful care-taker, filled them with dismay.

As they cast about to sum up their resources against this sudden calamity, it became evident that Maggie must give up her school. A small town like Litchfield affords almost no chance for trained help in the sick-room, and it would not do to depend on the voluntary assistance of friends and neighbors. Though the doctor counselled it, neither Maggie nor her father wished to send for Helen, chiefly because of the fear such an action would imply that the illness was of a dangerous character.

It cost Maggie a sharp struggle to give up her work; but she made no complaint, taking up her new duties as nurse and housekeeper with as much cheerful resolution as she could summon. A strange silence and sense of desolation filled the little house.

Maggie felt she would rather be scolded all day than so constantly miss the sound of those lively accents, which, now sunk to a feeble whisper, seemed to have been the only thing that kept the house alive. Thomas Dean went about with a dazed and frightened look, and a man's sense of helplessness, depending wholly on Maggie, and holding himself in humble readiness to execute any of her wishes.

Miss Graham proved a useful friend and adviser at this period; and, though she fretted a good deal about Maggie, and found fault with her, she watched her course with much secret admiration, and wrote Helen letters brimful of praise.

Three weeks passed before Mrs. Dean was able to leave her bed. Maggie was looking pale and overworn; but Helen was home now, and had assumed temporary direction of affairs. The air was a little warmer, and a purplish tint was spreading over the dead tree-branches, when the sick woman exchanged her bed for the big rocker; and, wrapped in quilts and supported by pillows, was drawn into the sitting-room, to await her husband's return to supper. He had gone out a few miles on the road that morning, to overlook a piece of repairing.

"You won't find me here when you come back," his wife had said, as he came in to take a parting look at her where she lay on the bed; but he had repeated the doctor's caution, and advised her not to hurry. Mrs. Dean, however, had obeyed the doctor's wishes as long as she meant to. Her old spirit was beginning to assert itself.

"I think mother is going to get well," Maggie said to her sister a few days before. "She scolded me this morning for bringing her broth in the wrong bowl."

Her daughters had helped her to rise, and adjusted her as comfortably as they could in the large chair; but the exertion proved greater than she anticipated, and she leaned back against the pillows, with white face and closed eyes.

"It has been too much for you," Maggie said, looking anxiously down at her.

"I shall sit up till your father comes," her mother replied, opening her eyes, and then closing them again. Neither daughter thought it wise to oppose her, while Maggie, thinking it best to encourage a resolve she could not hinder, began talking in a lively strain.

"I know he will be dreadfully disappointed if you don't," she said. "Poor father! he's been perfectly lost. I used to think Helen and I were of some account, but I've learned better."

A weak, flattered smile stole across the sick woman's face, and, feeling a little rested, she let her eyes wander slowly about the room. The sewing-machine had been moved to another corner, and she made a weak-voiced remonstrance against this and one or two other changes she detected.

"I suppose I shall find things at sixes and sevens," she said.

"Oh, they're way up to the twenties," Maggie gayly replied. She was setting the table, and, com-

ing back to her mother's side, she bent another examining look on her. Then, under pretence of drawing the quilt closer about her, she gave her an affectionate hug.

"I'm so glad to see you up again, that I don't care how much you find fault with me," she said, upon which her mother shrewdly surmised there was need.

"Plenty of need," said Maggie. "I have left undone those things I ought to have done, and have done those things I ought not to have done," she went on, with mock solemnity. "I've broken the glass sugar-bowl, and the parlor hasn't been swept for a month."

"The glass sugar-bowl!" her mother faintly exclaimed. This was the last of a respected set of three pieces, done in thick crystal ornamented with blue acorn handles, a part of Mrs. Dean's wedding outfit, whose old-fashioned ugliness Maggie hated. When the bowl slipped from her hands and fell crashing to the floor, she had been a little frightened at first, remembering her mother's feeling, then a wicked joy seized her as she picked up the pieces and threw them far out into the yard. She returned to her work of getting supper, stepping into the kitchen. A moment later, the outer door was flung open, and a boy with white, scared face stood on the threshold.

"Oh, Miss Dean!" he gasped, "your father — there's been an accident — the engine was thrown off the track and" — Further speech was prevented by Maggie rushing towards him and clasping her hand firmly over his mouth.

"Hush!" she exclaimed sharply, but in a low voice, while she cast an apprehensive glance towards the next room. "My mother! Speak low! Now, what is it?" But the boy did not answer, his eyes resting in a fascination of terror on a new object in the doorway, a tall, white-robed figure, with death-like countenance and large eyes fixed sternly on him. Maggie's look followed his.

"Mother!" she cried, springing towards her, and throwing her arms about her. Mrs. Dean swiftly released herself with what seemed superhuman strength, and, standing there erect, with not a muscle faltering, bade the boy tell his story. The latter, whimpering with fright, repeated in detail what he had told Maggie. Helen had now appeared on the scene, and the three women stood listening with blanched faces.

They learned that the accident had taken place near home, on the farther side of the railroad bridge, and that Pete Harmon, who had been on a drunken spree for a week, had some connection with it. "They're a-bringing of him home now," the boy ended, with stolid intent to accomplish the whole of his errand; and his words sent a bodeful chill to the hearts of his listeners.

"I always told your father that Pete Harmon" — but here strained nature gave way, and Mrs. Dean would have fallen if both daughters had not sprung to her assistance and supported her back to her chair. Here she rallied a little, pushing aside the hand with which Maggie held some restoring medicine to her

lips, and giving brief, martial-like orders for the reception of her husband.

A few moments later, a funeral-like procession of men arrived, bearing the senseless figure of the master of the house on a litter. Mrs. Dean would have risen to receive them, but Maggie, inspired both by a fear for her, and horror of the general scene, uttered a protesting cry, and, falling on her knees at her side, buried her face in her mother's breast. It was Helen who led the way to the bedroom, and assisted in placing her father on the bed, from which he did not rise for months.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ENGINEER'S CHOICE.

THOMAS DEAN'S skill as a workman was well known all along the road; and it was nothing unusual for him to receive an order to visit another point and oversee a piece of work. He was always glad to respond to such a summons, which gave him a day's respite from the shop, and a chance to take a run over the road. He got out his engine, oiling and polishing it with the pride a horseman feels in the grooming of his favorite steed. Having served as engineer several years when he was young, there was no part in the construction of the locomotive he did not understand. Like a true workman, he loved the results of his labor, and, to his thinking, there was no finer sight in the world than that of a shining little black engine skimming over the track. He almost envied the sight to the men at work in the fields, pausing to look at him as he shot by with the speed of light. He had the same sense of mastery here that Miss Graham felt at her piano.

With his hand on the throttle-lever, and a watchful eye bent along the line of track before him, he seemed to make exultant bound after bound through space, to measure and pass the blue distances before him with

a glance. Thomas Dean was conscious for the most part of being a very slow and uncouth specimen of his kind, but behind his engine the feeling of glad dominion took the place of every other. Half-shaped thoughts, that at other times only oppressed him, now presented themselves in some clear idea of duty and useful action, so that he could breathe freely and hold his head erect. In a silent, aspiring nature, such feelings are akin to religious ecstasy. The musical click of the engine, the noise and whir of the revolving wheels, blended in the engineer's imagination with the sound of the deep-toned organ and uplifting chant heard in church, raising feelings of worshipful praise and thanksgiving.

Maggie used often, when a child, to go with her father on expeditions of this kind. Nothing was to be compared then to one of these long, glorious rides on the engine. Sometimes her boy-playmate was permitted to accompany them, and that was a day long remembered by both. But the charm of this, with other childhood sports, was lost as she grew into young womanhood. This morning, however, she came out on to the porch with her father, and when he told her his plans for the day a wistful expression crept into her eyes. "I wish I could go with you," she said. A look of pleased surprise broke over her father's face.

"Would you like to go?" he asked. It would seem like getting his little girl wholly back again to see her perched once more in her old place in the cab, while they went speeding past the fields and woods together. But a shade of doubt crept over his

face after the first anticipative glow. "Your mother couldn't spare you, I'm afraid."

"Oh, no, I couldn't go, of course," was the reply, spoken in that resigned tone Maggie had fallen into of late. "Good-by." With one of her sudden impulses, she lifted her face for a kiss, which he gave with another show of surprise, and a look of humble gratitude that hurt her to see. He then descended the steps and walked slowly out of the yard, Maggie waving her hand to him as he turned at the gate, then going back into the house.

It was near nightfall when Thomas Dean prepared to return home, giving himself just time to make the run before "No 7," the through freight, came along. He was tired, and glad of the prospective rest of evening, when he climbed to his place in the cab and steamed slowly out of the station. He had done a good day's work at some broken machinery, and there was honest satisfaction in that thought; but just now the sense of physical fatigue was uppermost, subduing the exultant feelings of the morning to a quieter mood, which the little locomotive seemed to share, retracing its way at a smooth and decorous rate. The engineer thought of them all at home, and remembered what his wife had said — that she should get up that day, "doctor or no doctor." He recalled Maggie's looks as she stood beside him on the porch, the young spring sunshine falling about her. Soon he caught sight of the village steeples and the court-house dome. "No. 7" was probably not more than a mile in the rear. He was drawing near the bridge

spanning the Race and a deep gully at its side, and had but to shoot across on to a side-track which the switch-tender stood holding open for him, leaving "No. 7" to come thundering by with its long line of heavily loaded cars. But before he could do this, his eye caught sight of an unaccustomed object on the bridge. Peering forward through the gathering dusk, he recognized Pete Harmon, whose swaying figure, trying to span the wide spaces between the planks, showed that he was in his usual condition. The little engine whistled sharply, but the one to whom this warning signal was addressed was in just that state of drunken bravado which resists the least attempt at interference. Instead of showing fright, the poor fool slowly turned in his place, vainly trying to straighten his toppling figure, while, with grotesque gestures of mingled sport and defiance, he beckoned the engineer to come on.

The next moment he recognized his old employer, and every other feeling changed into furious rage. He shook his fist, swung his hat insanely, and filled the air with impotent curses. The engineer had quickly reversed his engine, which still sent up shriek after shriek of danger, while, leaning far out of the cab, he wildly waved the intruder to one side. And now another danger threatened from behind. A second whistle sounded in the rear, and Thomas Dean knew "No. 7" was bearing steadily down on him. The next moment there was the signal of "down brakes," but he knew it was too late. There was a single chance of safety. Either he must let

loose the lever of the throttle-valve, leap ahead across the bridge, mindless of the fate of the insensate creature who stood in his way, or —

There is but one choice in a crisis like this with such a man as Thomas Dean, though he would never admit he really made it. There was only a flash of time between knowledge of what was coming and the event; but it was long enough for the passage of many thoughts. A quick pang of grief over the destruction of his beautiful engine, a swift vision of the evening home scene, his wife with pale, wasted features heroically keeping her promise to sit up until his return, and Maggie setting the table; a prayerful gasp of thankfulness that she was not with him, and then came the crash. He felt himself hurled violently through the air down the steep embankment. Consciousness had quite gone out when they lifted the broken and bleeding frame to bear it home.

Long before Thomas Dean rose from his bed he knew he was crippled for life, and could never return to his old place in the shop. Another foreman was employed, with a superintendent from the city, and a new *régime* set in at the Locomotive Works.

Mrs. Dean forgot her own weakness, and rose at once to the emergency.

"I hain't got no time to spend in convylessing," she said, in reply to a word of caution from the doctor. "If you want to fix me up some iron bitters, you can, but I guess it'll be something besides iron that keeps me goin' now."

The married daughter, who had meant to return to

her own home about this time, remained a few weeks longer, to help the family through the critical period of this new calamity.

The circumstances of the accident were quickly noised abroad, and the little community in which the engineer lived, half of whom did not know him by sight, became exultingly conscious that it had a hero in its midst. Glowing accounts of his courageous deed were printed in the town newspapers, and copied in larger journals abroad. Rector Fay, who was not without an æsthetic appreciation of a fine action, and who welcomed any occasion for an effective sermon, preached the following Sunday on "Obscure Heroes," and the narrow dimensions of St. Luke's were filled with a delighted congregation. Maggie read the announcement of the sermon in the *Weekly Gazette*, with a feeling of angry humiliation. She pointed it out to Helen, who read it quietly through without apparent feeling of any kind.

"It is impertinent!" said Maggie, in a voice of quavering excitement.

"It is ignorant," her sister calmly replied, and the subject was dropped between them.

Some public-spirited citizens undertook to raise a subscription for the benefit of the injured man, and here Maggie's pride received a new injury. Her mother also was highly displeased.

"Subscription!" she exclaimed. "If that is Mr. Fay's doings, you can tell him to stop it right off," she said to one of the neighbors. "When Thomas Dean and his family come on the town for support,

we'll let 'em know. Subscription, indeed!" she repeated, in high scorn. "They'd better get up a subscription to paint the rectory. I'm sure it needs it bad enough."

Aside from this matter of the subscription, Mrs. Dean bore the publicity of her present situation with her usual feeling of honest desert. She was, in truth, full of bristling pride in the accident, though she spoke slightingly of her husband's behavior, as something that might contain a natural surprise for the rest of the world, but could not be expected to astonish her. She could have told people that was the way Thomas Dean would behave — a man that would go round to another door rather than disturb their old Nancy, asleep on the threshold. Nancy was an ancient Maltese, who had long outlived her usefulness, and had the temper of Petruchio's Kate.

A still deeper cause for gratification on Mrs. Dean's part lay in the thought that they could afford a spell of sickness if they chose. The little fund at the bank, which she and her husband had taken such honest pride in putting by, was now as proudly drawn on, and this, with the income derived from a small accident policy, enabled the family to present the same brave and independent front to the world as before.

The same impulse which prompted the discourse on "Obscure Heroes" led Rector Fay to pay a few visits to his parishioner's bedside, and aroused a genuine if not deep interest in what he regarded a new object of psychological study. Usually, the minister's interest flagged before the end of his

visit, for, like most imaginative people, Mr. Fay found it easier to occupy himself with his own conceptions of men and women than patiently to study them from their own point of view. He had the same liking for ideality in men's actions as for the atmospheric tone of a picture; but the ideality of a nature like Thomas Dean's is an elusive quality, which responds to but a single touchstone — sincerity. The rector, after a few visits in which he vainly tried to sound the undiscovered side of the hurt engineer, wearied of the effort, and was forced to the conclusion that a man may be capable, under pressing circumstances, of very striking behavior, yet be undeniably dull and uninteresting in the main. He even began to question whether every act of so-called courage and self-sacrifice may not be accounted for on very plain cerebral processes, and if blind physical force and instinct are not at the bottom of most of the world's boasted moral heroism?

Miss Graham, who never shared the rector's conclusions when she knew them, suffered a similar disappointment. She also had a love of psychological analysis, and Thomas Dean became an object of almost morbid curiosity with her at this time. She hung eagerly on every word, construing each to accord with far-fetched theories of her own. The sick man seemed to understand this expectant attitude of some of his friends, and their disappointment. He was, however, quite unable to fulfil the dramatic requirements of the situation, and a perplexing sense of failure came over him at times, together

with that irritated feeling we all have when held to a standard we never professed. Something of this feeling came out one day in a conversation with Miss Graham, whose company he was growing to like very well, except for those processes of moral vivisection to which she subjected him from time to time. She had been praising him, not very tactfully, for his patience and the resigned spirit he had shown during his sickness.

"I dunno whether to call it resigned or not," he replied. "I guess I ain't one o' the kind that makes much fuss. But ef anybody thinks I wouldn't rather be back in the shop, bossin' the hands, than lyin' here"— He paused with a discouraged sense of the uselessness of words to describe some feelings.

There was another reason for his discontent, unconnected with the thought of his own condition, and which his listener understood. Affairs were not going as well at the "Works" as before the loss of the old foreman, whose rule had been both gentle and firm, and whom long acquaintance had endeared to most of the men. The new superintendent had brought better instructed ways with him from the city, he thought, but the men were dissatisfied, and there were rumors of coming trouble.

"I wouldn't worry about that. They'll get along," his visitor answered understandingly. "It's perfectly natural, of course, that you should want to be back in your old place. The Lord doesn't give a man such physical energy as you have without meaning he should use it." Miss Graham's familiarity with the

Lord's purposes never failed her. "I am told you are the best workman on the road."

"I guess there's others as good as me." Praise from unprofessional sources affected Thomas Dean as it does most honest workers. "Looks as if some of 'em might get ahead if they tried," he added, moving his huge weight painfully in bed.

"Oh, you mustn't be discouraged. You'll be up again soon, and, even if you are not, it's a comfort to think neither you nor your family will suffer." This in allusion to a pension recently voted the engineer by his former employers. Mrs. Dean had regarded this act as only a just reward of merit.

"This accident has done one good thing, at least," Miss Graham continued. "It has proved that corporations do sometimes have souls. That's what comes of being a hero," she ended lightly. A displeased frown appeared on Thomas Dean's face.

"I ain't no hero," he broke out, in feeble-voiced protest. "Excuse me, ma'am, but I'd like to say a word 'bout that."

Miss Graham bent eagerly forward to listen. Now, at last, she was about to gain some clew to the nature of this silent, restrained man.

"I've been turnin' it over in my mind," he went on, fixing his large, gaunt gaze on her, "but I dunno as I can make it plain what I mean." He paused, with that look of perplexed distress that always came into his face during his rare attempts at self-expression.

"Folks hev ben makin' a great fuss over what I

did," he began again, a thin flush rising to his cheek. "Now, what I want to say is, they'd ought to know that just because Pete Harmon was drunk and didn't know what he was about, was all the more reason why I shouldn't run him down. Would a man step on a blind baby crawlin' across his path?"

"Some men would," Miss Graham made candid reply, "especially if they had no choice than to fall backwards over a precipice. Most people think it would only have been a just punishment if Pete Harmon had been killed."

"People will think what they please, I s'pose," in a discouraged tone. "And as to punishin', mebbe I was put on to that engine to run over Pete Harmon and punish him, and mebbe I wa'n't. Mebbe it was for just the other thing, to take care of him and see he didn't get no harm. Anyway, I'd ruther the Lord would do his own punishin'."

"I wouldn't," his listener promptly replied. "I'm one that believes the Lord works through human instruments. Suppose David had talked like that when he went out to slay the Philistines?"

"There ain't no Philistines livin' round Litchfield that I knows on," was the undisturbed answer. "How did David behave to Saul the time they were alone together in the cave?"

Miss Graham laughed and gave up the argument, cunningly alleging in excuse that the sick man's fever was rising, and he ought not to talk any more. Afterwards she said to Maggie, standing at her side, as she instructed her in a new kind of broth, "There's

no use in trying to make a hero of your father. He won't let us."

"I don't know what you mean by hero," Maggie replied, rather proudly. "It was natural my father should do what he did."

"That may be. All goodness is natural, at least that is what my religion teaches; but that doesn't seem to hinder people's being a good deal surprised when they see it."

"I don't know why people should be surprised. If you mean that a man like my father" —

Maggie paused, finding it difficult to explain. Her sensitive nature was keenly alive during these days, and the atmosphere of public comment in which the family were now living elated and depressed her by turns. She was sincerely proud of this new revelation of her father's character, at the same time that she was both hurt and angry over the manner in which the general approbation of his conduct was expressed. The assumption that because her father was a workingman and uneducated — the *Gazette* had spoken of him as "an illiterate but illustrious son of fame" — his action was the more meritorious, offended her deeply; while the other hypothesis, which formed the motive of the discourse on "Obscure Heroes," that this very social insignificance rendered such action more probable, — it being well known that Grace Darling and other examples of that kind owned a humble origin, — pleased her still less. Maggie found herself greatly perplexed, and was obliged to re-arrange her ideas of the heroic.

At first, the better knowledge gained of her father had the effect only to make her feel less acquainted with him than before. She had also a sense of failing duty towards him. Healthy youth is apt to be repelled from every form of physical weakness, and Maggie had often been ashamed of the feeling which made her shrink from the company of the sick and the very old. The undemonstrative temper of this family hindered their mutual helpfulness in many ways. Maggie had often envied the ease and confidence which marked the relation between Bertha Fay and her father; but the barrier of an unshared mental life is hard to overcome, and it was not altogether her fault that she could not get nearer her father.

Thomas Dean observed his daughter attentively at this time. He was better now, and able to sit bolstered up in bed. The hours dragged by with leaden feet, and he occupied the time counting the bottles on the bureau, and in the study of a highly colored lithograph of Rebecca at the Well, which hung at the foot of the bed. He looked at his thin, weak hands, big and clumsy as before, with the grime of the workshop, which years of toil had made part of the original texture, still staining the finger-tips, turning them wonderingly about like a child. This feeling of self-bewilderment increased when he caught sight of his gaunt, sunken features in the little mirror; while his voice, reduced to a fine, quavering treble, filled him with fresh dismay every time he heard it.

"I feel sorry for your father, lying there day after

day. It is much harder for him than it would be for a less active man," said Miss Graham to Maggie one day. "Can't you do something to amuse him?"

Maggie flushed guiltily, for the question addressed itself to an awakening conscience. There were many devices to which she had resort in imagination, to relieve the tedium of her father's sick-room, which an unaccountable feeling of shyness held her back from putting into execution. Ashamed that her filial remissness had been noticed by others, she seized the first expedient that offered itself. Her father was a noted checker-player among his mates, and, taking the checker-board, Maggie went to the bedside and offered to play a game with him. He looked surprised but pleased also, and readily consented.

"Of course you'll beat me," she said, as she perched herself on the side of the bed, "but perhaps it will help to pass the time." Then conscious this was not spoken with the readiest tact, she added, "You beat everybody else, don't you?"

"Well, I don't know," was the reply, spoken in a gratified but modest tone. "I guess not everybody. There was Henry Parsons, he got so he could beat me — used to be nip and tuck between us sometimes. Henry's pretty long-headed."

Maggie was busy disposing the pieces on the board, and did not make a direct reply.

"And Helen — she plays a pretty good game, doesn't she?"

Her father made a half-articulate sound of assent, loyally forbearing to enter on the strict merits of this

question. "Checkers ain't much of a woman's game, anyhow," he added apologetically.

Maggie made the first move, and the game proceeded in silence for a while. Her intentions were excellent, but it was difficult to keep her thoughts from straying.

"What do you mean by 'long-headed'?" she asked, dreamily, as she moved one of the black pieces to an adjacent square.

"I mean he wouldn't have made such a move as that, and let me jump three men right into the king-row," her father replied, indicating her mistake with his long, bony finger. Thomas Dean pretended to few accomplishments, but the thing he undertook to do he did well. A bad move in a game of draughts afflicted him in about the same way as a piece of poor workmanship in the shop. Maggie uttered an exclamation, and hastily replaced her piece, then, after a moment's deliberation, moved it in another direction.

"Now, Henry Parsons wouldn't have done that neither. He would 'a' moved this man — so," her father corrected her again, pointing to another piece. "That would have blocked me on this side of the board so's't I'd have to move over here. Then he'd 'a' stepped in between these two men, and the next move after he'd 'a' jumped this one, and so moved on up to the king-row."

This intricate process Maggie saw through clearly enough when it was explained to her, but it would have been impossible beforehand.

"And what would Henry Parsons do now?" she asked, with a slightly satiric accent, when her turn came again. "Yes," she went on, smiling a little, "I mean Mr. Parsons shall play this game. Every man has a right to be tried by his peers. It's too silly, your playing with me. Besides, I want to learn," she made haste to add, as she noted the troubled look on her father's face.

He smiled and humored her whim, instructing her in each succeeding move, save one or two she was quick enough to detect for herself, but which she declared Mr. Parsons should receive no credit for.

"Then, if you two have gone into pardnership, I may as well give up," her father said, with mild humor. Maggie flushed at this, but let it pass, knowing the innocent intention underlying the words.

"Why, we shall keep on doing this forever," she said, when they had reached the last stage of the game, where one of her kings stood barricaded by the enemy, and the remaining two pieces danced coquettishly back and forth in the double corner.

"Yes, it's a draw game."

"What's that?"

"A game in which neither beats," she repeated, after her father had explained. "Well, I don't think much of the virtue of 'longheadedness' if that is all it can accomplish. I choose this game shall have an honest ending. There!" pushing her man directly in the adversary's way, where it was bound to be captured. "Serves Mr. Parsons right!" she ended, closing the board. "I don't know what business he had to in-

terfere, anyway. Now, I'm going to get you something to eat."

Maggie could sometimes speak in this careless and apparently natural manner of Henry Parsons, while at other times she could with difficulty bring herself to mention his name. She had read Helen's letters many times, and the effect had been to so re-establish the belief, hardly needed, in her lover's continued loyalty, that it seemed at times equivalent to a complete reconciliation between them. It was as if the letters had been written to her, and she were reading them with the writer's full consent and knowledge. These undefined feelings entered unconsciously into her behavior, as in the little conceit she had practised in the game of checkers. She coquetted with the image of her lover much as she would have done with the man himself had he been present.

At other times, this confidence was overlaid by a little cloud of doubt and self-distrust. She remembered that her understanding of Henry Parsons's feeling did not stand for any enlightenment on his part towards her, or point the way to it. She thought she knew her old playmate well, but a woman seldom estimates a man's modesty aright, which may be as delicate and priceless a quality of his nature as of hers; and as weeks went by, after Helen's departure, and the letters naturally ceased coming, it often seemed to Maggie she had received a direct rebuff. One day, soon after the accident, she brought her father a letter bearing a Dakota postmark, which he asked her to open and read to him. It was short, but of friendly

tone, the writer expressing deep sympathy for the injured man, and an earnest desire for further news of him. Thomas Dean listened with a gratified countenance, and made Maggie read the letter again.

"It had oughter be answered," he said, when she had finished.

"Mother will answer it," she replied, not meeting his glance; but Mrs. Dean was unused to exercise with the pen, averring she had plenty to do without that, and Maggie was obliged to act as scribe.

"What shall I say?" she asked, dipping her pen in the ink-bottle.

"Tell him we're much obliged for the letter, and hope he'll write often. Say we ain't forgot how to miss him, and are lookin' to see him back here on a visit before long."

Maggie thought she would not say just that, but asked no further instructions, writing a brief note of thanks, strictly impersonal and business-like. She tried to make it perfectly polite, but could not foresee how the politeness might seem but cool civility to the reader. Conscious of a good deal of kindness within, she was not aware how closely she had guarded its expression, and looked for an answer to her letter. But Henry Parsons, pained anew by what seemed to him the very essence of arctic frigidity done in six lines of a young woman's flowing penmanship, did not write again. So keen was his disappointment that he was obliged to ask himself what it was he had expected, and what had been his real motive in writing to Maggie's father. He had

believed it at the time to be honest anxiety for his friend; but this appeared now a mere subterfuge, which he tortured himself into thinking Maggie had seen through at once, and punished as it deserved.

In pursuit of the same daughterly impulse which led to the game of checkers, Maggie approached her father's bedside, a day or two after, with a book in her hand, and offered to read to him.

He gave wondering assent, and, seating herself, she began the story of Oliver Twist. She could not tell whether her father listened very well or not, and had an uneasy sense he was watching her instead; but her experiment was rewarded the next day by a question from him,—

"Is there anything more to that story you was readin'?"

"Oh, yes," she replied, "a whole bookful. Shall I read to you again?"

"Well, I got kinder interested," he said, with a shamefaced look.

Maggie was deep in the account of Oliver's walk to London, when her mother entered the room, and viewed the proceedings with a disapproving eye.

"I don't know about this," she said. "I've heard that readin' 's bad for sick folks. It makes 'em flighty."

"Very well," Maggie replied, resignedly closing the book; but her father received this interruption with an impatience he seldom manifested.

"I guess I ain't goin' to get very flighty over a made-up story in a book," he said, and turned a look

toward Maggie that plainly bade her continue her reading. Mrs. Dean attempted no further argument, only shrugged her shoulders, as much as to say she washed her hands of the affair, and left the room.

The readings occurred regularly every day after this; and a careful observer might have noted the dawn of a new intellectual life in the disabled engineer, who, bereft of the exercise of those physical faculties which had hitherto played so important a part in his life, was now thrown back on unused mental qualities. He listened to Maggie's reading with growing interest and intelligence, and even fell into the habit of picking up the book she left within reach, and going on with the story himself.

In this way they read nearly all of Dickens together, and had begun on Scott. A new feeling of companionship began to spring up between father and daughter. It was a genuine comfort to Maggie to be able to refer to Mr. Mantalini and Pleasant Riderhood with an assurance of being understood. Mrs. Dean continued to look on the readings with good-natured scorn, declaring the family was getting quite too "litterary" for her. She never knew a Weatherby that cared anything for books.

Months had worn away before Thomas Dean was able to sit up in his wheeled chair, the highest stage of physical restoration he would ever reach. This was an epoch-making day in the little household. The wreck of strong, self-reliant manhood on which the family had leaned never seemed so complete as

at the sight of that large, emaciated frame, sitting in bent posture, with limbs twisted helplessly underneath, and pathetic eyes speaking inward anguish and despair. Maggie could not bear the sight, and escaped to her room, to give way to passionate weeping. Her love for her father was of deeper root than she knew, combining memories of her happy, sheltered childhood with growing filial yearning and compassion, difficult to explain. She was coming to learn the strength and meaning of the ties of nature, how truly and necessarily she fitted into those relations in which she had been born. The sight of her father, sitting quiet and uncomplaining in the wheeled chair day after day, could never become common to her, but continually touched both heart and imagination anew, where sympathy gave rise sometimes to admiration, then to pain.

"Why is it the sight of a certain sort of goodness hurts us, instead of making us glad?" was one of the questions she put in a letter to her brother at this time; and he replied that such feeling is part of the universal divine compassion covering the world and linking men and women to its source.

She was to see John Norton soon. The exacting duties of the past few months had imposed some physical strain on her; and as she meant to resume teaching in the fall, and needed rest and recuperation, she accepted an invitation from Helen to spend part of the long vacation in Greenville.

CHAPTER XX.

LITCHFIELD'S CELEBRATION.

MAGGIE had several semi-philosophical talks with her brother-in-law during her visit; but she profited less by the preceptive teaching thus afforded than by daily companionship with the teacher. Her regard for John Norton grew constantly. The young minister had none of the habits of the recluse. Except for a few busy hours in the forenoon, his time was spent in active work outside his study. He was an ardent student of sociology, and a zealous but enlightened philanthropist. Settled in his new pastorate, he had at once organized a number of branch societies of a mixed social and literary character, in each of which he brought to bear the full powers of a strong, enthusiastic nature, capable of engendering enthusiasm in others. Maggie found herself, she did not know how, drawn into immediate co-operation with these different enterprises. She went with Helen to the Sewing Circle, blistering her hands in cutting nightgowns for some poor children, and accompanied John regularly to the Literary Union, — to get points for Miss Graham, she said.

"If I lived in Greenville, I think I should become a useful member of society," she wrote that friend. "Next to John's capacity for work himself is his

faculty for setting other people to work. All at once, while you suppose you are attending to your own affairs, you find yourself plunged in some new scheme of his, and working for it as furiously as he is. After a while it may occur to you, if you are a reflective creature like myself, that the real source of your enthusiasm is not the Girls' Sewing School nor the Cruelty to Animals Society, but John Norton. I had the bad taste to hint something of this kind to him once, but he didn't like it. He likes his work better than he likes himself, and has the least personal vanity of any one I know. He is a favorite with the young people, and all the young women adore him without being the least in love with him. I think they envy me because I am Helen's sister. As for Helen, she seems perfectly happy, though in her usual, unobtrusive fashion. John is devoted to her, not in any foolishly demonstrative way, but in constant thoughtfulness. He asks her advice about everything, even to the length of his sermons; but I think that is because she never tells him to shorten them. 'It is more important that John should express his full thought,' she says, 'than that the people should get home to dinner.' Altogether, they're a happy and useful couple, and you'll find me a highly improved character when I come home."

Helen watched the growing intimacy between her husband and her sister with approving eyes and a relieved sense of responsibility. Pride in her husband's work and influence, and her perfect trust in him, made any feeling of envy impossible, towards Maggie or

any one else. She had not married a man like John Norton expecting to retain the rich beneficence of such a nature for her own private uses. It would show poor regard for the great new possession that had fallen to her to envy its power of helpful service to others. Marital love, like the religious sentiment, is to the worthiest souls but another means of human helpfulness. Her husband was to Helen Dean like the sun; she rejoiced in his power to shine. A minister's wife holds a delicate and difficult position, but which is relieved of many of its perplexities when a man of the sound, upright nature of John Norton is the minister. Much of the false sentiment attaching to the pastoral side of his office, he had always held in healthy dislike. He was not lacking in sympathy, but it was of the kind that seeks to impart a noble self-reliance, and does not degrade itself to the cosseting cares of the sick-room and nursery.

Maggie remained with her sister until the end of the long vacation. She was looking forward to her return home, and to her work in the schoolroom, with happy anticipations, when she received news, in a letter from Miss Graham, that caused her one of the sharpest disappointments of her life. Her school had been given to some one else, to the woman who had taken her place in the spring; the reason assigned being that Mrs. Edfield was a widow with young children to support, who needed the financial aid the position would bestow more than Maggie did. Maggie's sense of injury and indignation nearly made her ill at first. Her pride also had received a

sharp blow. She had felt so secure in her position, so confident of the merit and success of her labors, and of their indispensable character, that this sudden disappointment fell like a disgrace, except for that old, irretrievable sense of injustice which had afflicted her before, and now burned anew.

"It is not right," she said to her brother, in a choked, indignant voice. "It is not right. Do you think it is?" looking up at him with a quivering face.

He stood pulling his beard in the way he had when in a thoughtful or disturbed state of mind, with an expression on his face as nearly approaching displeasure as ever rested there.

"It certainly doesn't look so now," he replied, carefully, divided between his wish to comfort Maggie and love of truth.

"Her being a widow has nothing to do with it," Maggie continued, warmly.

"I wouldn't say it had 'nothing' to do with it. Cases sometimes arise where a Board has a right to decide the claims of a candidate on the ground of personal necessity, though it's usually done at some risk to the public service. Do you know this Mrs. Edfield?"

"Know her! I don't know her as well as the Board does," was the quick reply. "She has been in the school twice before, and both times was discharged for incompetency."

"I wouldn't say that, Maggie. It doesn't sound well," her sister interposed.

"I'm not saying it. I'm only telling John. She's been a genteel pensioner on the charities of Litchfield ever since her husband was drowned, at a Sunday-school picnic three years ago," Maggie explained. Her listener pulled his mustache to hide a smile over the sarcastic minuteness of this account.

"Of course, it was much more pathetic, his being drowned at a Sunday-school picnic," she added, catching a hint of encouragement from his manner.

"Maggie!" Helen said, reprovingly.

"How does it happen you have no contract?" John asked. "I thought the contracts were drawn up and signed in the early summer."

"So they are; but I couldn't sign then, on account of father," in a trembling voice. "But that is no excuse. There was a perfect understanding about the matter. I was to have the place if I wanted it. I wrote to the secretary of the Board just before I came away. He didn't answer the letter, but I thought that was only an oversight."

John Norton shook his head. Whether in condemnation of her carelessness, or of the secretary's cowardice, Maggie did not know.

"Why don't you write to Judge Foster?" her sister asked. "You have received no official notice. Perhaps it is only a rumor Miss Graham has heard."

Maggie turned abruptly away. "I don't wish to write to Judge Foster," she said.

"Why, I thought he was a very good friend of yours," Helen answered, in some surprise. "I am sure he would help you."

"I shall not ask him to help me," was the reply, still more shortly spoken. Helen and her husband looked at each other with puzzled faces.

"I'm sorry, dear," the first said, putting an arm about her, "but you mustn't make it harder by fretting. You will find something else to do," she added, with attempted cheerfulness. "You can go on with your German."

"Yes, there's no loss without some gain," John said. "This time, the gain is ours. You can stay another month in Greenville."

"Oh, no; I must not," Maggie hurriedly replied. "I have staid too long already. Besides, you wouldn't find me agreeable company," looking up at her brother, with a rueful smile. "There'll be no living with me now."

"I hope father won't find it so," Helen said, with a note of anxiety.

"I shall try not to hurt father."

John Norton, standing near, put out his hand, and began stroking Maggie's hair with a kind, quieting touch.

"I shouldn't mind it," she said, with a little break in her voice, and looking at him through her tears, "if I hadn't always tried to do my best; studying new ways to interest the children, and trying to improve my work in every way I could. But that is all that people care. There's no use in trying to be different from anybody else. I had better have gone on in the same old way the rest did, — singing the capitals, and repeating the multiplication table backwards."

Her brother made no response to this, patting her cheek and turning away. It was as well to let this little burst of injured feeling expend itself. He knew from his own experience how real, and to a degree just, this feeling was. He had not spent three years in the itinerant service of the missionary field, before settling down to his present charge, without having illustrated several times over that portion of the sower's parable relating to the seed that fell on stony places.

Maggie's disappointment was the sharper that it was the first of its kind. In her youthful confidence she had imagined that her efforts to improve the rusty methods of her predecessors had produced a marked impression on the Board and the public at large, and that she had become, in a sense, a necessary factor in the work in which she was engaged. If Miss Graham had been with her at this time, she would have reminded her of the small relative importance even the greatest actors on this little human stage can attain, by quoting a line from her favorite: "Everybody is needed in this world; nobody is needed much."

Miss Graham's letter contained other news.

Litchfield, including the entire county of the same name, was about to celebrate its semi-centennial anniversary. The celebration was to take place the middle of September, and to consist of a long processional parade, a grove meeting with patriotic songs and speeches, and an open-air banquet.

As daughter of one of the early settlers, Miss

Graham had taken an active interest in the celebration, from its inception; but her letter failed to arouse much interest in Maggie until towards the last, when she casually mentioned that Henry Parsons, who was expected home about this time, had been invited to deliver an address. Litchfield wished to honor itself in its younger generation, as well as in reminiscences of the older.

"His grandfather was one of the twelve original settlers," Miss Graham wrote. "I don't know why the thirteenth wasn't as original as the rest, but, as my father also happened to be one of the twelve, I can't be expected to take great pains to find out. It's queer the way things come about — that the son of the worthless Tim Parsons should be discovered to be the grandson of Henry the First. I wonder if the fact that the younger Henry is doing pretty well had anything to do with the discovery. They say he has made a handsome profit for Mr. Danvers out there. Squire Parsons was the foremost man in the county in his day. It was he and my father who laid out the site of the present village, and built the first turnpike road. I dare say, though, that his grandson would have preferred to keep the line of good behavior unbroken through the three generations. He used to feel his father's disgrace very keenly, I am told." Maggie did not like this last sentence, and frowned a little as she read it.

The letter contained two postscripts, — one to the effect that there was a threatened outbreak at the Locomotive Works, the result of the men's increased

dislike of the new superintendent; and that her father was much disturbed over it.

The second told the news of Laura Danvers's return home. She had spent the summer with a friend in the East. "She is greatly improved, and not in looks only," Miss Graham wrote. "She is a young woman of more than ordinary intelligence and sense. She has evidently been under some new influences, during her absence, very different from those she was brought up under. She is actually thinking of studying medicine. I never thought of Laura Danvers turning strong-minded."

This letter had a depressing effect on Maggie, and increased the feeling of discontent with which she prepared to return home. She tried to banish the thought of Henry Parsons from her mind, which, in consequence, kept returning, being inevitably accompanied by the remembrance of his business connections with Mr. Danvers. She was proud of the honor his native village had bestowed on him; at the same time she was a little piqued at it.

Meantime her disappointment about the school remained to dampen her spirits and chill that natural ardor and happy self-confidence which were like wings to her. She tried to excuse what she recognized as an unhealthy mental state by saying she had nothing to look forward to; and was complaining to John Norton of the dull routine of the life she was returning to, as they stood together on the station-platform, waiting for the train, when he put a little book in her hand, paper-bound, and numbered as one of a series.

"Read that on your way home," he said. "I came near forgetting to give it to you."

She looked at it, and raised her eyebrows.

"A tract?"

"Yes, but one of the kind that makes you dislike the name less."

"'Blessed be Drudgery,'" she said, reading the title aloud. "Doesn't the title involve a contradiction of terms?"

"Read it, and see," was the answer.

She turned the leaf and glanced curiously down the first page. "I see what it is the writer tries to prove," she said, with a touch of saucy assurance. "He begins by showing that drudgery, rightly understood, is no drudgery at all. Then, having proved it something very different, he calls it 'blessed.'"

"That will do very well, considering you've only read half a page. You'd make a good reviewer. But if he really proves it, why shouldn't we thank instead of blame him? This little pamphlet has done a world of good," Norton continued, taking it in his hand, and turning the leaves. "I have distributed hundreds of copies among poor, hard-working people, who have thanked me afterwards with tears in their eyes. I would rather have written a sermon like that than the *Principia*."

"Why, John!"

"I don't say the *Principia* isn't the greater work of the two; but just because this seems the smaller, simpler thing to do, I should like to have done it. I don't care for the big things. I couldn't have written

the *Principia*, anyway; but I envy any man the power to put some glory and beauty into what is called the common side of life. Some day, we shall have grown too wise and reverent to call any side common."

The shriek of the incoming train prevented further talk, and a moment after Maggie was seated in the car. She smiled a good-by to John through the window as the train moved out of the station, attended to the various preliminaries of her journey, and then, adjusting herself in the corner of the seat, read the little pamphlet. It proved to contain just that word of brave and kindly counsel she needed, and she finished it in a fine glow of enthusiasm, which warmed her heart and spread the radiance of a new, inspiring thought over her face; so that a weary fellow-passenger, sitting opposite, looked at her admiringly, and wondered what she was thinking about. Yet the lesson of the little tract was not new. The same theme, in some form or other, filled most of the pulpit discourses she heard. Life's trials, rightly understood, are the highest means given us to enrich and discipline character; but here in this little tract, owing either to her mood or the writer's skill, the thought, which seemed trite enough before, was presented in a way to leave a strong and vivid impression, opening a sealed fountain of gratitude, tenderness, and trust within. "My daily task, whatever it be, that is what mainly educates me," was one of the sentences which kept singing itself over in Maggie's memory. "It is the angel aim and standard

in an act that consecrates it," was another she marked with her pencil. But the words that stirred her most were found a few lines farther on. "Have you never met humble men and women, who read little, who know little, yet who have a certain fascination, as of fineness, lurking about them? Know them, and you are likely to find them persons who have put so much thought and honesty and conscientious trying into their common work that finally these qualities have come to permeate not their work only, but so much of their being that they are fine-fibred within, even if on the outside the rough bark clings."

"My father!" thought Maggie, with a swelling pressure, like an ache, in her breast, and a quick rush of tears which she would not let fall. Her heart went out in a little impulse of love and expectation to the cottage where she was born, and to the maimed and crippled figure of her father, sitting in his wheeled chair and counting the minutes until her return. Her discontent still remained in part, and there were a hundred things she did not understand and would not pretend to approve of. Perhaps, though, she should not have been any better contented had she been born to some high, privileged order of existence, the daughter of the secretary of state or some distinguished hero, and certainly she should have missed some things. This discontent had never taken the form of wishing to be anybody but herself, and without that she began to perceive she could not greatly alter surrounding circumstances.

Her father was boyishly glad to get her back again, receiving her with a humble gratitude and pride that made her reproach herself for remaining away so long, and give him a voluntary promise never to leave him again.

"Wal, I sha'n't hold you to that," he said, "but let it be a long time first."

"I hope it won't be till the fall sewing's done," her mother put in. "Seems as if everything 'd give out at once. I guess it's just as well you didn't get the school. There's enough for us both to do at home."

Maggie's mental reply to this was that if she had got the school she could have hired a seamstress, to say nothing of a new fall suit and a set of Ruskin she had meant to buy. Her mother's reasoning was apt to begin at the wrong end, but she envied her that undisturbed complacency which can always turn a disadvantageous circumstance into a benefit. To others who ventured to refer to her disappointment, Maggie replied with a show of indifference.

"Of course, if our schools have become charitable institutions, I have no claim to the place," she said, and dismissed the topic.

The town was full of excitement over the coming celebration. The lines of social distinction were changing, and everybody was engaged in computing the length of his ancestral connection with the county. There was a great deal of talk about the original settlers, and Maggie began to see that it might be quite an advantage to have had a grandfather; but hers

slept under a little decaying headstone in an obscure corner of an English churchyard.

"I can just remember Uncle John drivin' into the village in a canvas wagon when I was a little shaver 'bout nine years old," her father said, one day, in rum native fashion. "There wa'n't but one store in the place then, besides a blacksmith's shop on the corner where the court-house stands."

"You came with your Uncle John from England?" said Maggie, who had caught the general infection of family reminiscence, and was willing to review a history she was already familiar with.

"Yes. When my father and mother died, Uncle John took charge of me and sister Letty. He hadn't much to do with either 'xcept a few pounds he'd saved to emigrate to America, and he had eight children of his own."

"I think he must have been a very good man," said Maggie, thoughtfully. She occupied a low seat near her father's chair, and rested her cheek against the arm.

"Sister Letty died," her father continued, his voice sinking a little. "She wa'n't never over-strong, and the passage was too much for her. She had blue eyes like yours, but she wa'n't much like you other ways. She was always so quiet and uncomplainin', one o' the kind that seems easy to die. I used to think Uncle John didn't miss her so much as he would one o' his own children, — I don't suppose you could really expect him to; but I missed her — a good deal," drawing a long breath.

"Were you homesick after she died?" Maggie asked.

"No, I can't 'xactly say I was homesick. I hadn't nothin' to be homesick for 'xcept my father's and mother's graves. And I had Letty's grave here. And Uncle John always dealt fair enough by me."

"I don't know why he shouldn't. Tell me about my grandfather."

"Wal, I don't remember much about him; he died when Letty was a little thing, just toddlin' 'round. He wa'n't as pushin' a kind o' man as my Uncle John, and he'd ben unlucky all his life. I guess he got kinder discouraged."

This picture was not an enlivening one, and Maggie asked no more questions.

When the day of celebration came round, she went with her mother and Miss Graham to the grove where the exercises were to take place.

Mrs. Dean, whose especial claim to distinction, as a Weatherby, was not forgotten at this time, was one of the committee having charge of the big dinner, and had a full sense of her responsibility, but thought she could spare time to hear Henry Parsons's speech.

Thomas Dean had also been called on to contribute his share to the day's proceedings. He had been invited to sit on the platform. Litchfield wished to make the most of all her resources, and was bent on giving the public a sight of the brave engineer. His wheeled chair was placed on a low truck, garlanded in green, and borne to the scene of festivity. The chief actor entered into the affair reluctantly, at the

same time that the people's kindness moved him deeply. It was good to be out again among his friends and neighbors. Maggie's quick pride was set on fire.

"I don't know why people should make a show of him," she said to Miss Graham, in a displeased tone.

"They're not making a show of him," was the swift reply. "Is there any reason why Litchfield shouldn't bestow a little recognition and honor on a man like your father, I should like to know? Every one should be willing to contribute his share at a time like this."

"I thought you disliked Litchfield, yet you've done nothing but talk about this celebration for two weeks."

"I used not to like my Aunt Deborah, who lived at our house. She had a mint of money, yet was the most miserly and ill-tempered soul I ever knew; but that did not hinder me from doing as the rest did, and giving her a little present on her birthday. And I noticed she was better-natured for a day or two after that. Litchfield may take a fresh start and try to get the new reform-school here."

The weather proved propitious, and people came flocking into the village from all sides on the morning of the appointed day. A large platform had been erected in the centre of the grove, for the accommodation of the speakers and distinguished guests, with rows of rudely built benches in front for the multitude. Maggie meant to find an obscure place for herself, behind some sheltering tree or shrub, where she might see all that was going on and re-

main unobserved; but the double matronage of her mother and Miss Graham made this impossible, and she found herself seated conspicuously, near the middle aisle, well toward the front. The *Weekly Gazette* had announced the arrival of Henry Parsons the day before; but Maggie would not look among the group of people seated at the left end of the platform to see if he was there. She could not avoid seeing Judge Foster, however, who was chairman of the day, and was busily moving about with that important air which befits official greatness at such times. She saw Rector Fay and his family ascend the platform, and noted the eager way in which the judge stepped forward to meet them and conduct them to their seats, taking lengthened pains in their selection. This little incident, together with some new effect of shyness and timidity in Bertha, struck Maggie's attention. The rector's expression was more than usually complacent, she thought, but his wife wore the pale, tired look that had become habitual.

"Have you heard the news about Judge Foster and Bertha Fay?" her old schoolmate, Fanny Brown, whispered to Maggie, from behind. Maggie started.

"What news?" she asked.

"Why, of their engagement! Just think of it! He is nearly forty years older than she is!"

Maggie made no reply, a host of disturbed emotions keeping her silent. She looked at Bertha again, and understood now that expression of timid self-consciousness. The news she had just heard had given her a profound shock, pierced by a queer little pang

of envy. She did not want to marry Judge Foster herself, but just for a few passing moments it would not have displeased her to have people know, Fanny Brown and Rector Fay especially, that she, Maggie Dean, daughter of the crippled engineer, might have been sitting on the platform, the favored recipient of the chairman's polite attentions. Maggie felt rather small when she recognized this feeling, and tried to fix her attention on something else.

There was another arrival which she was compelled to notice. When Mr. Danvers came on to the platform, all eyes were attracted to the figure of the tall and graceful young woman at his side. Laura Danvers certainly had improved, as Miss Graham said. The old air of mingled constraint and pride had given way to a more self-possessed bearing, still a little reserved, but neither cold nor repelling. Her face had gathered a different expression during the last two years, suffused with a brooding thoughtfulness, the result of some rich inner experience, which made Maggie like to look at her. Perhaps her stylish city costume, not striking, but of perfect taste and fit, and exactly adapted to the wearer and the occasion, had something to do with the pleasant impression the new-comer created.

"Isn't Laura Danvers splendid!" the irrepressible Miss Brown again whispered from behind. "Have you called on her yet? I did the other day, and what do you think! — she means to study medicine! They say she isn't going to marry her cousin Sidney after all."

"Isn't she?" Maggie asked, in an unconcerned tone.

"What a little chatterbox that Fanny Brown is!" Miss Graham whispered, at her side. "There couldn't be a greater contrast to Laura Danvers. There's a young woman that means to make something of herself. You ought to know each other better. I've been talking to her about you."

"Then, I'm afraid it's quite hopeless," Maggie replied, with a careless touch. Her own wish ran in the same direction, but some instinct told her she and Laura Danvers were not destined to come very near each other. The next moment, there was a shout from the crowd, as a gayly decked wagon was driven through the grounds, with Thomas Dean sitting inside like a conquering hero. A dozen men rushed to assist in placing the wheeled chair, with its heavy burden, on the platform, while the air rang with admiring huzzas.

"They will hurt him," said Maggie, anxiously, as she watched the eager but clumsy efforts of the men to accomplish their difficult task.

"If this isn't as good as a month's sickness to him, then I miss my guess," her mother made foreboding comment from the other side.

"Nonsense!" said Miss Graham, "it will do him good. Now, don't let him see you two worrying," throwing an admonitory glance first to one, then to the other. "You'll only do him harm that way." Miss Graham had recently become interested in the mind-cure, and believed that as a man thinketh so he is.

"I wish they wouldn't put him there, though," Maggie said, "right in the sun." Miss Graham looked and saw that the wheeled chair had been carelessly placed just where the sun's rays fell on the unprotected head of the occupant.

"I'll send my parasol up to him," she said.

"No, wait," Maggie quickly replied, putting out a hand to detain her. A young man, sitting in the group at the end of the platform, had also noticed this mistake, and, rising, stepped across the intervening space. He bent over the maimed figure in the chair, and clasped Thomas Dean's hand in both his own while the audience, towards whom his back was turned, could not see the tears in his eyes. Seating himself near, he raised an umbrella and held it over his companion until it came his turn to speak.

Maggie's heart leaped to her throat, then sank fluttering back. For a moment she worshipped Henry Parsons. She had not really seen him before, though that was not because she had not known where to look for him; and, crouching behind the broad back of a well-to-do farmer in front, she took furtive observation of him.

"Is that Henry Parsons?" Fanny Brown again bent forward to whisper. "Why! he's grown quite handsome! I hardly knew him, with that mustache."

"Would you have known the mustache without him?" Miss Graham asked, frowning backwards through her spectacles.

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean, Miss Graham," the young woman replied, drawing her-

self up; and as Miss Graham did not know, either, she did not try to explain.

It was time for the exercises to begin. There were opening remarks by the chairman, music, prayer by one of the resident clergymen, and a poem by Rector Fay, before Henry Parsons stepped forward to perform his part. He paused to give place to the round of friendly applause that greeted him; then, as it died away, let his eyes wander slowly over his audience. He had not greatly changed during his absence, except that an additional manliness seemed to express itself in his general look and bearing. His face wore its usual grave expression, and he seemed quite at ease; but he himself best knew if he really felt so. Maggie began to be troubled. His preliminary pause seemed perilously long to her, and a quick fear that he might fail darted across her. At last his eyes met and held her own. There was no sign by which another could have guessed his recognition of her, no answering flush or tremble on her part to show her acceptance of this look; but for a passing half-moment, forgetful of the surrounding scene, their souls met and claimed each other. It was to Maggie a supreme moment. She knew now that she loved Henry Parsons. That he still loved her, she had no doubt. All her little, superficial airs and affectations dropped from her in the first startled sacred knowledge of her real feeling, so that if her old lover had stepped down from his place and taken her by the hand, boldly claiming and leading her away, she would have followed him obediently.

She did not attempt to forecast any practical means of reconciliation, or arrange the details of their future acquaintance, only let her exalted fancy float above all difficulties, content with her present silent happiness. She listened dreamfully to the address on "The Ethics of Country Life," which she afterwards heard highly praised, but could never rightly say she had heard. At its close, her mother leaned across Miss Graham to speak to her.

"I must go now," she said. "I promised to come back in time to help about the coffee. I leave you to look after your father."

"I will go with you," said Miss Graham, and Maggie was left alone.

Her mother's words had broken in on a highly wrought mood, and her thoughts floated earthwards. There was need she should look after her father. He looked pale and exhausted after the morning's excitement, and, though she disliked going near the platform, she pushed her way through the crowd and placed herself at his side. Thomas Dean's friends, otherwise engaged for the moment, seemed to have forgotten their charge; and Maggie stood helplessly by, the anxiety and embarrassment of her position increasing every moment. At the end of the platform stood Judge Foster and the Fays, Laura Danvers and her father, with a few others, grouped about the orator of the day, congratulating him, and exchanging friendly remarks with each other.

"Wait here a minute, Parsons," she heard Mr. Dan-

vers say, as he separated himself from the rest and ran down the platform steps. "You are to go with us to dinner." Maggie felt that her situation was becoming intolerable. Mrs. Fay, turning, saw her, and stepped quickly across to her, giving her hand, with a word of pleasant greeting, first to the father, then to the daughter.

"You are tired, Mr. Dean," she said, bending an attentive look on him. "We must get you home at once."

She stepped towards some men standing near, and spoke to them, who came quickly to his assistance, and Thomas Dean was borne awkwardly but safely back to the green-wreathed truck waiting to convey him home. Henry Parsons, talking with Laura Danvers, noted the little commotion, and, abruptly excusing himself, ran down the steps to bid his old friend good-by. Maggie's heart beat with new elation. She had been in doubt whether to follow her father or not, but was no longer so. She turned to descend from the platform at the other end, meaning to lose herself in the crowd and escape home before he came, but was arrested by a well-remembered voice speaking her name. Looking back, she saw Bertha Fay coming towards her with outstretched hand and smiling face. Bertha had been longing to see and speak to Maggie for several days, all remembrances of their past trouble being obliterated by a new imperative need of her. Encouraged by her mother's action, she had taken this bold step towards a reconciliation.

"Maggie! Oh, Maggie!" was all she could say, as she came close to her and extended her hand. Surprised and perplexed, Maggie could only stand in her place while she mechanically extended her hand, and let it remain in her friend's.

"Bertha wants to come to see you, I think," Mrs. Fay said, coming to their relief, her sympathetic tone showing approval of her daughter's action. "She — she has something to tell you."

"Yes, Maggie, do say I may come. Papa is quite willing and" — She stopped, aware that she had blundered.

"Why, certainly," Maggie replied, with some restraint. "I shall be very happy" — Then, catching the look of mortification and pain in Bertha's face, her old love rushed over her like a wave, sweeping the last remnant of wounded pride away. "Yes, do come," she said, clasping the hand she still held, with a quick, affectionate pressure. She then became aware of Judge Foster standing near, looking down at the scene with a pleased but embarrassed countenance. In one of those generous impulses which made Maggie's manner as charming at times as it was natural, she turned towards him, greeting him in the same cordial and unrestrained way he remembered of old. The judge was delighted and immensely relieved. He could almost have sworn no subject of near personal interest had ever been broached between them, or, if there had, she had forgotten all about it. Turning, Maggie saw Laura Danvers looking at them, and the two exchanged a rather formal bow.

Each wished it had been something more, but neither knew how to make it so. The next moment, Maggie heard her father calling her. She must go to him, notwithstanding the proximity of Henry Parsons. Every other figure seemed to lose distinctness as she made her way towards these two. What did her father want of her? she wondered. Ostensibly it was only to tell her she had better stay on the grounds with her friends; that two or three neighbors, who were to accompany him, would see him safely bestowed at home, and that he could get along very well alone for a few hours. But Maggie would not listen to this, and said she should go home at once.

"Wait a minute," said her father, as she turned away. "Ye ain't seen Henry Parsons yet. Here's Henry," turning to indicate the young man at his side. Maggie looked in his direction and met a dark, entreating gaze fixed on her. The driver was impatiently snapping his whip, and a small crowd stood near, waiting the departure. There was nothing to do but extend her hand, which she withdrew immediately.

"I've ben tellin' Henry he must come and see us. He ain't goin' to stay very long — only 'bout a fortn'i't, he says." She had been compelled to drop her eyes, but now lifted them again, to meet that deep, questioning look.

"Mother will be glad to see you," she said, in a low voice, and again turned away. The driver cracked his whip, and a chorus of voices shouted a

joyous farewell. Then Maggie heard Mr. Danvers speak again.

"Come this way, Parsons; we are waiting."

Walking slowly towards home, her fancy easily construed the picture of Henry Parsons accompanying Laura Danvers and her father to the festive board, where seats of honor awaited them at the upper end, among other select guests of the occasion; while she went on her way forgotten and alone. The exultant feelings of an hour before had quite died out. It seemed now the merest accident that a certain pair of eyes had met her own. Her cheeks burned at the presumption of which she had been guilty in daring to discover a special meaning in their long look, which vain fancy had construed into a direct message to herself.

The brief exultant mood which held her a few moments before, had given way to a host of tormenting doubts and fears that pricked her like so many needles. It was plain that Miss Graham had spoken the simple truth when she said Laura Danvers had improved; and if she had taken to being intellectual, and that sort of thing, and Henry Parsons were so useful to her father, nothing could be more natural. Maggie was not jealous, she told herself consolingly. It was no such poor feeling as that made her sensible of the difference between Laura Danvers's lot and hers. She was not only magnanimously bent on not blaming her old schoolmate for profiting by advantages out of her own reach, but heroically granted every virtue to her, generously affirming that she

deserved every good thing likely to befall her. A young man of Henry Parsons's type would naturally appreciate, to the full, those earnest and serious traits which made up a character like Laura Danvers's. And yet, those letters to Helen; and he certainly had looked at her as if —

What proportion of mixed reflections like these were rooted in real conviction, or formed the cause for mere surface irritation on a temperament modified anew by every little passing circumstance, Maggie herself did not stop to inquire, and it is needless for any one else to attempt to settle.

She reached home tired and depressed, to find her father worn out with the day's exertions, and needing her care. She set about getting dinner for him, and afterwards adjusted him in the large chair for his afternoon rest.

"Henry's a pretty good talker," he said, looking up at her as she replaced the pillow under his head. She made a low-voiced assent, still busying herself with the pillow.

"And he ain't changed a bit 's I kin see. Jest the same straightforrard, sensible chap he always was. He's gettin' along first-rate, too, I should think. Mr. Danvers 'n' some o' the rest of 'em seem to set a good deal o' store by him. They're goin' to form a buildin' association and make him secretary, so your mother was sayin'."

Maggie had lowered the chair, so it was not easy for him to continue talking, as she suspected he would have liked to do; but it was not easy to

listen, and she drew down the window-shade, and went softly from the room, leaving its tired occupant in desired quiet and darkness, while she went up to her chamber to think over again the events of the day.

CHAPTER XXI.

BACCHUS AND ARIADNE.

When Laura Danvers left home for a year's instruction in the higher branches, it was with a young girl's vague notion of what it was she really wanted. The year's course was extended to two, at the end of which she accepted an invitation from her room-mate, Mary Slade, to spend the summer at her home in one of the manufacturing towns of Connecticut. She had paid a short visit there before, during one of the holiday vacations.

Somerville College was noted among institutions of its kind for thoroughness of method and an enlightened aim. Laura had intended at first to study only music and the modern languages, but she had not been an inmate of the college long before new ambitions were kindled. Here, where she was thrown in contact with choice young intellects of various climes, her own began to quicken, and her mind lost its provincial narrowness and stiffness. She felt herself more congenially placed among these picked daughters of wealthy and cultured families than in the little town where she was born. This mental contentment soon began to show in an improved manner, which, though it would never have the spontaneous grace and freshness of Maggie Dean's, came to ac-

quire a quiet graciousness of its own, that warmed and softened her whole character. Laura Danvers never became a popular favorite, but she gained steadily in the regard of both teachers and pupils, and this period was marked by the beginning of two or three friendships that lasted through life.

Her most intimate friend and companion was her room-mate, Mary Slade. It had been a sharp disappointment to Laura to learn, when she entered college, that she must share her room with a stranger. It is impossible to measure the different result which might have ensued had each of these young women, both new arrivals, and coming from widely separated points, been allowed to cherish her loneliness in a room by herself. The two were somewhat alike in a natural reserve, and a certain elevation of purpose. In Laura, this purpose took the form of an extreme conscientiousness, fostered by pious instruction, and showing itself in a minute and punctilious attention to little duties. In Mary Slade, brought up in an atmosphere of greater mental activity than her room-mate, it took wider range, and manifested itself in a love and knowledge of ideas. She was the daughter of a wealthy New England manufacturer, and the inheritor of a strict Puritan integrity combined with a keen intellectual relish for the living problems of the day. Laura had hitherto associated all questions of social reform with women of Miss Graham's type, and until now she did not know that such subjects as universal suffrage and labor-unions were seriously discussed anywhere outside the ranks of

their extremest advocates. A family like that of the prosperous mill-owner's was a revelation to her. The Slades used none of their wealth for display and selfish indulgence, but devoted all their time and service to the care of their employés. Mr. Slade divided his profits with his workmen, and kept a general oversight of them. He was assisted by his wife, a woman of sound character and intelligence, and continually spurred on to some new experiment in drainage or ventilation by his two children.

The oldest was a son, who had finished his studies at Yale two years before Laura met him. Bertram Slade was of the same intellectual and moral fibre as his sister, but of a more sensitive type, with abstracted manners that bespoke mental pre-occupation, lacking somewhat in practical wisdom, and pronounced by some of his friends a dreamer.

"Bert is too romantic," his sister once said to Laura. "He tries to make a story or a picture out of every person he meets; he lets his imagination work on these people too much. He persuaded my father to open an art class for the children of the factory hands, and got a trained teacher from Boston to instruct them. His theory was that, by developing the sentiment of beauty, you destroy the impulse to evil. He thought those Irish boys would stop robbing my father's orchard if they understood free-hand drawing."

"And didn't they?" Laura asked, casting a sympathetic glance towards a certain photograph on the mantel.

"Not right away; but it might have been worse. The teacher was young and distractingly pretty, and Bert did not fall in love with her."

"Is he so susceptible as that?" the other asked, trying to speak carelessly.

"I don't know as you can call it susceptible; he is morbidly sensitive, and too much of a theorist. That is why he gets so easily discouraged. Little things affect him almost as much as they do a woman. Bert ought to have been a poet. You are prepared to excuse a good many things in a poet."

"You mean they have different moral standards from ours," Laura said, with an anxious note, and a prejudiced recollection of Shelley and of the author of the "Bride of Abydos."

"Oh, Bert's morals are all right. My mother says his success and happiness all depend on the kind of woman he marries. If he marries a sensible girl, interested in the same things he is, she will help him; but if he marries a simpleton, it's all over with poor Bert."

"I should not suppose that was likely, in a family like yours."

"You never can tell. Bert is the most modest man in the world, and has the most exalted ideas about women. He sees a new Madonna in every one he meets, except in his sister."

This was one of several conversations which enabled Laura to form a mental picture of her friend's family before she saw any of them. She could have picked out her room-mate's parents from a crowd,—Mrs.

Slade with her tall, well formed figure, composed manner and intelligent accent; and her husband, large and paternal, with an experienced and business-like air. Laura felt she had very little to relate in return for the knowledge thus gained of this busy household, and shrank from the questions naturally proffered respecting her home-life.

"My father is a dealer in leather," she explained to her friend. "He does not employ many hands. If he did, I am sure he would want to do what is right for them. There are no very poor people in Litchfield," she added, apologetically. "We do not have to build hospitals — we can take care of them ourselves. My mother does a good deal of such work. She is President of the Aid Society in our church." She felt the meagreness of this account, but could do no better.

At the end of her first visit to his home, Laura felt well acquainted with Bertram Slade; though, when she examined this feeling, she found it based on no very definite or intimate knowledge she had gained on the subject, but on a general atmosphere of kindness, and the remembrance of a pair of dark, earnest eyes which seemed to follow her about.

Some new sentiment, very warm and sweet, lay like a young nestling in her heart, and a look of dreamy reminiscence hung over her for days. The acquaintance was renewed a few months after, on a flying trip of the young man's to Iowa to look after some business claims of his father's, when he stopped over for a day's visit to the college. Laura did not

have a moment's discourse with him alone, nor did he seem to seek it; yet the remembrance of certain looks and tones remained to accentuate the former feeling.

An inevitable shyness might have prevented her from accepting her friend's second invitation, had she not known the brother was to be absent from home most of the summer. A week before her visit ended, he returned. Soon after she detected some subtile but fixed change, which could not but re-act on herself, so that she knew she appeared equally changed to him. In some unknown way she had offended, or, worse, disappointed him. She had always known she was not the equal of these new friends.

Mary Slade noticed the change also, but dared not rush to the rescue, as her direct, courageous nature impelled her. Her own desire to effect a certain result might have blinded her to the real wish of those most concerned, and she feared to blunder. It was easier to speak to Laura than to her brother, for the nearness that belongs to girls' acquaintance; but she could only do it in far-off, tentative fashion.

"Bert is so ridiculously sensitive," she said, one night, when approach to the subject was made easier by the shadowed moonlight which filled the chamber where they were undressing. "The idea of his flying out at me like that when I spoke of the uselessness of a classical education for most young men," referring to a discussion just closed downstairs. "Of course, I didn't mean him, though it's true that my father, who doesn't know a line of Greek, is a more successful

business man than Bert will ever be. But Bert doesn't want to be a business man, so I don't see who is hurt. I shall have to apologize again. It seems as if I had done nothing all my life but apologize to Bert. It was the same when we were children — if we quarrelled, I had always to go more than half-way to make up — not because he was ill-natured but because he is so sensitive."

If her listener caught any hint in this piece of sisterly frankness, she never acted on it.

There are young women who, in similar cases, can go more than half-way, but Laura Danvers was not one of them.

She did not try to define this experience or its effect on herself. It was too indefinite and dream-like for that. A golden hint and promise had been given her — that was all; but all her life she would go

> "the softlier, sadlier,
> For that dream's sake."

When she returned home, she felt she had left her girlhood behind her; but a life of useful womanhood stretched before her. She could not settle back into the characterless existence led by some of her old schoolmates. She might never see Bertram Slade again, but the inspiration of her acquaintance with such a man would remain.

She found her father unchanged; but her mother had failed in health, and clung to the strong, self-reliant daughter who had returned to her, as if their relations had been reversed. Laura might study

medicine or do anything she liked, if only she would not leave home again,—a difficult condition, but Laura willingly submitted to it for a time. Mrs. Danvers did not even press the point of a marriage with her cousin, being less disappointed in the result of things here than she had expected, and caring for nothing so much, just now, as to keep her daughter near her, and be taken care of by her.

The two cousins were able to reach an understanding with each other without serious heart-damage on either side. Sidney began one of his abortive attempts at love-making, one day, when they sat alone together in the stiff, but richly appointed parlor. His cousin quietly checked him.

"Don't talk like that to me any more, Sidney," she said, gently.

"Why not?" he asked, with boyish wilfulness, that sat very well on him.

"Because — well, because I don't want to listen. It's very nice in you to want to say pleasant things to me," she added, soothingly, as a mortified flush colored his cheek, "but it isn't necessary. Our good opinion of each other can be taken for granted," she ended, smilingly.

Sidney perceived he was to be let down easily, but felt a little piqued.

"A fellow is under a big disadvantage with a woman when she is his cousin," he complained. "Of course, she can't think much of him, because she's so used to him."

"No," was the gently serious reply, "that is not

it. We don't think less of things because we are used to them — we should be very small and ungrateful to do that, I think; but sometimes we catch glimpses of other things." She stopped, and colored a little. "We like our friends for different reasons: some because we know them so well, others because we know them so little."

Sidney was inclined to be amused at this, and she smiled also. "I mean because they are so new and different," she added. "I remember once when I was at the seashore with my mother — I was a little girl then — I used to amuse myself picking up pebbles. I gathered a very pretty little collection, just common little pebbles, which I kept in a glass jar. One day, I found something quite different, — a lovely blue stone, which pleased me more than anything I had seen; but I lost it almost immediately. I remember how long I searched for it, and how I cried because it was lost, — but I never found it." She spoke in a low, dreamful tone, with her eyes fastened, in far-off reverie, on the swaying muslin curtain near which she sat. She seemed to be talking to herself more than to him. Her cousin stared at her in undisguised surprise. His look drew hers, and she colored guiltily.

"I mean I never thought less of my little jar of pebbles," she said, confusedly.

"No, I suppose not." He considerately turned his eyes away. It was incredible that such a girl as Laura could tell him a story like this. What did she mean by it? What a handsome girl she had grown to be! With a little encouragement, Sidney

felt he could be genuinely in love with her. He rose from his chair, and, thrusting his hands in his coat-pockets, took one or two turns about the room.

"I am one of the common little pebbles," he said, coming back and standing directly in front of her.

"No, dear," she made quick reply, looking up at him with beautiful candor. "You are my cousin Sidney, whom I shall always think a great deal of, provided I do not have to think any more of him." She gave him an arch, kindly smile. "We shall always be the best of friends, but we must never — marry."

"Why must we not?" in half-peevish tone.

"Because there is not the right feeling between us. When people marry, it should be because they need each other, and because giving each other up would be like, like dividing one's life in twain," drawing in her breath, — "all our best thoughts, our dearest hopes and motives. Only half the old self would remain." Again she seemed to be speaking to herself, and her cousin looked down on her with increased wonder. The shyest natures are often, under pressure of long-repressed feeling, the boldest.

"You and I like each other, as cousins, very much," she continued, coming back to the personal aspect of the question, "but that would not prevent us from often wearying and disappointing each other in any nearer relation. There are many ways in which we should fail to suit each other. I don't want to hurt you, cousin," bending toward him, "but I shouldn't want a husband who was always joking and expecting

me to laugh. Not that I mind your jokes now: I think some of them are very good."

"For that matter, you needn't laugh. Wives don't always do what their husbands expect; and, after marriage, I might lose the habit of joking."

She rewarded this with a little laugh, then proceeded seriously as before.

"No, we should not suit each other," she repeated. "We should always be trying to please or entertain each other. I should often feel lonely; you would get tired and seek other company, and I — I should not care if you did. There is never any feeling of loneliness or difference in a true marriage. One would feel as much alone — as safe and free, I mean — as when really alone — more indeed. It is like Providence."

Her listener was so increasingly surprised by all this, so full of admiration for the combined modesty and courage of the speaker, her daring unconsciousness, that he forgot his own disappointment, if he had any.

"I see," he said, falling back on his old manner, to relieve the portentous gravity of the scene, "in married life the number two not only stands for better company than three, but for a completer solitude than one. Is that it?"

"Something like that — yes," with lowered voice and eyelid.

"It's pretty deep. You took an extra course in metaphysics when you were at school, didn't you?"

"Don't laugh at me, Sidney."

"Laugh at you! I should think not. By George! I begin to think you're the finest girl in the world, Laura! It's always that way," he went on, lugubriously. "When a girl refuses a man, she does it in such an exalted kind of way that a fellow goes off thinking ten times more of her than before."

"I haven't refused you, dear. Don't be troubled about that. I haven't refused you," smiling, and rising from her seat, "because you have never really asked me."

"Haven't I?" he asked, brightening a little.

"No; but some day I hope you will ask some one and be very much in earnest about it, and I hope — forgive me, cousin," laying her hand on his arm, "that she will not say 'yes' too easily."

"You think, with difficulty, she can be made to say it, though?" he put in, with apparent deep anxiety.

"Not that I want her to tease or play with you," smiling at his fun, but not replying to it, "only to test you. And I hope, too, she will be a little your superior, so that you will be a little afraid of her; not want to disappoint her, I mean, because, you know, you will be so fond of her."

Her cousin looked at her, one emotion after another running wave-like over his mobile countenance: surprise, amusement, and grateful, admiring affection.

"I don't know what I've ever done to you, Laura, that you should be heaping so many virtuous wishes on me," he said, with affected dismay. "I feel as if I was about to offer myself to Miss Graham. She'd

bring me out. Are you going?" he asked, as she made some suitable reply, and turned to leave the room. She excused herself by saying she had an errand down-town.

"Well, good-by, then," coming towards her and extending his hand. "It is a kind of 'good-by,' you know." She placed her hand frankly in his, which closed over it with a warm pressure. He hesitated a moment; then, with characteristic audacity, bent down and kissed her. She flushed and quickly withdrew her hand, looking a little displeased.

"I beg your pardon," he said, flushing a little, himself. "I didn't mean to. At least, I thought it would be all right now that we are nothing but cousins. Do forgive me," he ended, speaking seriously, and with an irresistible accent. She smiled a little, bade him good-by, and left him.

Alone, he threw himself in a large chair and began twirling his mustache, meditatively. A few moments after, Mrs. Danvers entered the room, with her slow and feeble step.

"Where is Laura?" she asked, looking about the room.

"Picking up pebbles on the sea-beat shore," was the reply, spoken with perfect gravity. She looked at him with a puzzled face. He rose and went towards her. "It's all over, aunt," he said, in a tone of mixed melancholy and cheer. "Laura won't have me. She likes me very well as a cousin, but as a husband she thinks I would be too amusing."

"Dear Sidney," said his aunt, laying her hand on

his shoulder, and looking at him sympathetically, "you mustn't take it too hard. Laura is very fond of you — she always was," letting her stout figure sink slowly down into a chair. "I am sure there is no one else."

"Think not?" he asked, eying her brightly a moment. "But I don't know that that makes it any better for me. On the whole, I think I would rather a girl refused me because of some one else, than on the ground of general undesirability."

"I am sure Laura hasn't anything against you, Sidney. She's changed in so many ways since she went to college! I am not complaining of her. Every one says she has greatly improved. You think she has improved, don't you?" looking up at her nephew.

"I think she is a trump," was the prompt reply. "We ought all to be proud of her."

"Yes, of course. It seems so good to have her home again, but she has changed. I suppose it is Mary Slade's influence. It was she who put it into Laura's head to study medicine."

"Angels and ministers of grace!" exclaimed Sidney, under his breath. "Is Laura going to study medicine?" he asked aloud.

"So she says. Don't you approve of young women studying medicine?" she asked, solicitously.

"I guess it won't hurt the young women. I approve of my cousin doing whatever she wants to," he added, more seriously. "A doctor's diploma can't hurt a girl like Laura."

"That's what I told her father. Of course, we never dreamed of such a thing. Perhaps it would have been better if we had sent her to a different kind of school; but at Somerville all the girls expect to do something, she says. But Laura hasn't taken up with any free-thinking notions. People like that often do, you know. She says she is just as good a Presbyterian as she ever was. Mary Slade is a Congregationalist."

Sidney smiled sympathetically. "Mary Slade was her room-mate?" he asked, with idle interest.

"Yes — here is her photograph," taking an album from the table. "She seems to be quite a superior young woman. Mr. Slade is very wealthy, Laura says, and his daughter can do anything she likes, — go to Europe or anywhere, — but she does not want to. She has accepted the position of district visitor in Boston, in order to learn the best methods of charity work."

"She looks like that kind," Sidney observed, examining the face before him. It was not a striking one, but clean-cut and intelligent, with wide brow and large, clear eyes.

"Who is this melancholy chap beside her?"

"That is her brother."

"Ah, Mary Slade has a brother!" in a sudden accession of interest, bending to examine the photograph more closely. "Laura knows him, too, I suppose," in a careless tone, but attentive for the answer.

"Not very well, I think. She seldom mentions him."

Sidney set himself to consider whether or not this was the best proof of non-acquaintance.

"He's a very superior young man, I believe. He has written for the magazines."

"They seem to be a very superior set," he made dry response, closing the album, and replacing it on the table. "Well, I must go." His aunt followed him to the door.

"I'm sorry, dear," she said, as they paused at the threshold, her maternal heart prompting some word of parting comfort. "Her father and I would have liked it very much; but, of course, we couldn't urge her. You mustn't let it make any difference in your coming here."

He had never thought of such a thing. Indeed, it would be easier to visit at his uncle's now than it had sometimes been before. He should have all a son's privileges, with none of a prospective husband's responsibilities; and, now that he was not going to marry his cousin, he felt he should want to see her oftener. But he could not disappoint his aunt by showing how little disappointed he was himself. He tried to look pensive, pressed her hand gratefully, and left her.

"If he is the little blue pebble," he said to himself, as he went down the street, and his mind went back to the photograph, "what an infernal cad he must be, not to appreciate a girl like Laura!" The metaphor was a little mixed, but the meaning was intelligible.

CHAPTER XXII.

AT THE WORKS.

When he reached the main street of the village, Gale noticed signs of some unusual excitement. Men, gathered in groups at the corners and in front of the stores, were engaged in earnest discussion, wearing anxious faces, and looking apprehensive of some near trouble.

There had been a feeling of uneasiness in the village for several days, caused by a disturbed state of affairs and threatened outbreak at the Locomotive Works. Things had not been running very smoothly there since the coming of the new superintendent, who had brought his own foreman with him from the city, with a few picked men, on whom he had at once bestowed the places of chief honor and profit. The superintendent himself was a man too young for the place, which he had secured through the influence of one of the directors of the road, without reference to his poor qualifications. The last he might have corrected, and escaped blame for his youthful inexperience had he possessed less youthful arrogance; but he was at that dangerous point when the gift of power swells the sense of self-importance. He had no sooner entered on his new duties than he began, in masterful fashion, to introduce new rules and meth-

ods, all tending to lessen the freedom and self-respect which the men had felt under his predecessor.

Thomas Dean was not a man of culture or large experience; but he had certain qualities of broad, native manhood, which made him a born leader on his own plane. His government at the Works — there had been no superintendent in his day — had been a little lax, perhaps, compared to the rigid discipline that pertains in the city factory; but it had, at least, been fruitful of harmony and faithful service. The old foreman had been the friend and neighbor of many of the men under his supervision. The forbearance and sense of responsibility which guided his treatment of the most troublesome one among them, Pete Harmon, marked his relations with all. Some of the men and their families were in the habit of visiting at his house, — the men sitting on the porch, on a summer evening, to enjoy a fraternal pipe, while the women gossiped indoors. The new foreman, copying the example of his superior, would have nothing to do with ways like these, holding himself socially aloof from the men in the shops, and seldom speaking to them except to give an order, or reprimand a mistake. The men felt the difference, and submitted to it with surly and defiant looks. They fell into the habit of gathering at the alehouse at night — better patronized during this period of discontent than it had been before — to discuss their grievances and magnify them in the repeated telling.

All this was what the superintendent had expected,

and felt not the least disturbed at. He believed suspicion on both sides, combined with the wish to circumvent, to be the natural relation of employer and workman. He would have deemed himself a fool to try to win the confidence of those dependent on him, who, for that reason, have cause to be equally thankful for a kick or a curse. This spirit was not altogether the outgrowth of a coarse or malevolent disposition, but was rather the result of intellectual deficiency and a brazen self-assumption.

Aside from this atmosphere of personal coldness and mistrust in which the men worked, they were treated as well as they had been. They were paid promptly, and worked a reasonable number of hours.

The rebellious spirit manifest in strikes and other public disturbances among their brethren in the large cities had never entered the quiet precincts of Litchfield. There were one or two trades-unions in town; but they led a sleepy existence, with hardly sufficient cause of interest to compensate for the yearly dues. Now, as the murmur of discontent grew louder, the people began to see that they had the elements of public disorder in their midst.

It was the superintendent's misfortune, rather than his fault, that, shortly after acceptance of his office, the company had ordered a reduction in wages. It was only a trifle; but the order, coming as it did through the hated manager, had all the effect on the men of the most tyrannous misuse of power. Under pressure of this new grievance, they threw political economy to the dogs, and cared nothing for the ac-

companying facts of an over-stocked market and a slackening demand for work.

Thomas Dean had been through such periods as this, but had been able to procure a wise and sympathetic adjustment of affairs, that preserved the confidence of the men, and kept them steadily balanced against misfortune until better times came. It was even said that at one time of unusual need and difficulty he had voluntarily given up a portion of his weekly wage in order to appease the universal misfortune by sharing it. No one looked to see Superintendent Lewis resorting to measures of this kind.

This underground murmur of discontent might have expended itself harmlessly but for a final circumstance which threatened to serve as a noisy and dangerous outlet.

The men would have submitted, perhaps, to the hardship of smaller wages for themselves, but when the rumor reached them that the superintendent's salary had been raised one-third, their smouldering wrath broke into flame.

Another man, more cautious, if not more humane, would have prudently declined this mark of favor; but Myron Lewis was never counselled by anything except his own vanity and selfish desires. Nor was he disturbed by the knowledge that this advancement had been secured on no ground of official merit and fitness, but solely as the prospective son-in-law of the director who had secured him the place, and who thus enabled his future relative to bear his share of coming wedding expenses.

The men had no sooner ascertained the truth than they took definite steps to express their resentment. They gathered at the alehouse in larger numbers than before, drinking the success of their cause in deeper potations of poor beer, and addressing a written protest to the young manager. This was presented by a committee of elderly men, old and trusted hands at the Works. The superintendent burned it before their eyes. That would teach these pestiferous fools a lesson, he thought, and it did. The men quit their places and walked out of the Works in a body, — on hearing which, the town authorities promptly ordered the close of the saloons.

This was Wednesday. An air of portentous stillness hung over the town for three days. The clouds of black smoke issuing from the huge chimneys of the Locomotive Works had disappeared, and the whistle had ceased to mark the working-day's divisions. Saturday night was approaching, the time when the men presented themselves outside the window of the superintendent's office to receive their pay. It was rumored they meant to do the same to-night. When the superintendent learned this, he gave it to be understood, with a bragging air, that in such case the men would receive pay for three days' work, no more. The men thought differently. Most of the citizens seemed to think differently also. Public sympathy had never been very active on the side of the well-dressed superintendent, and now began to lean decidedly the other way. Rector Fay had preached a sermon, the substance of which was that

servants should obey their masters, but nobody appeared to heed it. Mr. Danvers and one or two other business leaders, who had men in their own employ, held a midway position, offering much wise counsel to both sides, but committing themselves to neither. Miss Graham had started out at once to raise a subscription for the workmen's families. She did not hesitate to let it be known on which side her sympathies lay.

"As long as you behave yourselves and let the saloons alone, I'll stand by you," she said to the leaders of the uprising.

The friends of the superintendent, among whom was Sidney Gale, felt the obligations of this relation something of a burden just at present, and suspected he did not feel as brave as he talked. Gale had known Lewis in a business college both had attended a few years before, and had taken him in charge on his entrance into Litchfield society. He felt the more anxious for his friend, perhaps, that he was not altogether proud of him, and towards nightfall turned his steps in the direction of the Works.

The hour for the men to receive their pay was seven, but the unusual nature of the present visit delayed preparations until much later. When Gale entered his friend's office, he found him looking pale and nervous. The remnants of a cold supper, brought from his boarding-house, were on the table, and several pieces of folded paper were scattered over the floor.

"There's another," said the young man, as a small,

folded missive was flung through the window, and fell on the table near his visitor. Gale unfolded and read it.

"Shades of Brutus! The Ides of March wasn't a circumstance compared to this. Look!" handing the paper to his companion.

"Don't show it to me," was the pettish reply. "I've read enough of them already." Sidney glanced at the scattered papers on the floor.

"Well," thrusting his hands into his pockets, and turning to observe his friend, "what are you going to do?"

"Just what I said I should. Three days' work means three days' pay, and that is all it does mean."

The words had a confident sound, but the speaker's manner failed to support it. He tried to assume a courageous attitude, but failed miserably, and his voice betrayed a little tremor. His lips were white, and his hands trembled. Sidney looked at him with mixed pity and curiosity.

"Those fellows will find me prepared for them," he said, with the same weak boastfulness, taking a pistol from his pocket and laying it on the table.

His friend looked at it as he might at some curious insect from a foreign clime.

"Loaded?" he asked, in a careless tone.

"Of course it's loaded," the other angrily replied.

"Well, there isn't much use in having one unless it is loaded, but I guess we'll put this one in here." He opened a drawer, and, placing the pistol inside, locked it and put the key in his pocket.

"What do you mean?" the owner demanded, impotently. "Do you want me to be murdered in cold blood?"

"I don't want you to be murdered at all. I don't think you'd do the part of Cæsar very well, anyway, even if we had Pompey's pillar. You don't seem quite yourself, my friend," seating himself on the corner of the table, and regarding him leisurely. "I'm afraid you can't take any very prominent rôle in this play. I'll tell you," slapping his knee, "we'll give you the little lute-player's part. It's generally taken by a girl. Brutus covers you up with his cloak. You'll like that, I fancy."

"I wish you would stop your infernal chaff, and tell me what to do." Gale's sarcasm, which would have stung deeply enough at another time, now fell harmless on a consciousness possessed by the single growing sense of fear.

"Now, you're talking," said Sidney. "Get out your money and books and give them to me. I'll pay the men. You keep out of sight somewhere."

The other hesitated, — longing, but ashamed to act on this advice.

"Come, hurry up; they'll be here in a minute."

Outside was a distant murmur, and the sound of approaching footsteps. Sidney turned down the gas, and the two young men peered cautiously through the closed shutters. The workmen were coming in a solid column, supported by many rough and idle lookers-on. Some of them carried torches. The superintendent grew whiter than before, and drops of

cold sweat stood on his face. Sidney also looked a little sober.

"Where's the money?" he demanded, wheeling sharply about, and making preparations to carry out his design.

His companion took a roll of bills from his pocket and gave it to him, with a shaking hand.

"Is this the full week's pay?" Gale asked.

The other stammered something in reply.

"Don't be a fool, Lewis. Give me the rest of the money."

"Do you think I had better pay them full wages?" he asked, irresolutely. "I've sworn I wouldn't. You give these fellows the upper hand, and they'll never let go."

"Neither would you and I. You should do your swearing later in the day." He took a second roll of money the superintendent handed him, seated himself on a high stool before a table near the window, and was ready for action.

"Now, get behind that screen," he said to his companion. "I'm going to open the shop."

The latter looked at him in confused shame and fright.

"Of course, they won't hurt you," he said, excusingly. "They have no motive."

"Except that I'm your friend. Come, vanish."

The next moment the shutters were flung back. Impatient of the remaining barrier of the window, with its little aperture for the passage of the money, Sidney boldly pushed it upwards.

"For God's sake, don't do that," the superintendent whispered, from behind the screen.

"Shut up. We're not going to have any rat-behind-the-arras business in this play." To the crowd outside, Gale was disclosed in full view.

"Good-evening, honest citizens," he called out in a cheerful tone. "Come to get your pay? Just walk up and settle. Don't be bashful."

His listeners were taken aback, and for a moment no one replied, the men gathering in knots to discuss this new development.

"That's Sidney Gale!" the owner of the name heard some one say. "He's got enough gas to light the whole county."

"Come on now, men," he called out once more, but none of them moved.

"Where's the superintendent?" some one called, from the back part of the crowd.

"Sick with a cold," was the prompt reply.

This was received with a derisive laugh. "He'd better be," said one. "He's a damned coward," said another.

"All right. Have it your own way," Sidney answered. "Under some circumstances I might think it my duty to dispute you, but not to-night. There's too many of you."

There was another laugh at this, but it contained a friendlier note. Behind the screen, the victim of this kind of talk writhed and groaned.

There seemed nothing to do but go forward. The sight of the money was tempting, and they

were anxious to know how much they were to receive.

The first man to present himself at the window watched Sidney sharply, as the latter, counting a few bills, handed them to him, and then checked off his name in the large ledger. He counted them through also, started with surprise, looked pleased, and also a little ashamed, then darted a furtive look at Sidney, as if suspecting him of a mistake.

"It's all right, isn't it?" the paymaster inquired.

"Ye-es, it's all right, but" —

"Then, move on, please."

Word was quickly passed down the line that they were to receive full pay, and the men received this news with mingled satisfaction and disappointment. The wind had been taken out of their sails. They felt as David might when he went out to slay Goliath, if he had found the giant reduced to half his own size. The majority of the men were content to abide this peaceful solution of the problem; but a few others, stimulated by drink and evil passion, felt defrauded, and were ready to enter on any new scheme of mischief that should be proposed. Gale noticed them as he went on with his work, and was glad when his duties drew to a close. He observed a man outside, leaning on the end of the stone sill, and watching him curiously. He was dirty and unkempt, but looked good-natured. The corners of his mouth were stained with tobacco.

"You're pretty darned 'cute," he said, in an admiring tone, when he caught Sidney's eye, and during a

halt in the procession. Sidney modestly thanked him. "Can I do anything for you?" he asked, a moment after.

"Naw," the man drawled, leaning forward to let escape a stream of tobacco-juice. "Shouldn't wonder ef I mightn't do somethin' fer you bymeby."

Sidney did not know what this meant, and had no time to inquire, the men closing up and pushing towards the window. He noticed that his new admirer kept his place. There was still a large crowd outside, the men who had been paid remaining to watch events. Contempt for the cowardly superintendent ran higher each moment, and began to mingle with vindictive anger. It would serve him right to get him out and horsewhip him, some of the men thought; others suggested that the nearest lamp-post was a more convenient form of punishment, while the fancy of a few fondly reverted to the historic tar-barrel.

"Can't you get those men home quietly in some way?" Sidney asked his new acquaintance after the last man had been paid, and it was time to close up.

"They'll go a good deal sooner ef nobody tries to hev 'em," was the reply, as the speaker slowly transferred a huge quid from one cheek to the other. He leaned forward on the stone sill, in his dirty shirt-sleeves, and looked at Sidney shrewdly.

"He's in there, I suppose." Sidney appeared not to hear, making a final entry in the ledger, and then closing it.

"Then, I wisht, fer your sake, he wa'n't, — that's all," the man added, in a more concerned voice.

"Why, what the mischief do these fellows want?" the other asked, in some natural anger. "They have got their pay. Let them walk off and mind their own business." An evil-looking fellow, slouching towards the window, overheard these words, and his face showed an expression of vixenish triumph.

"We ain't a-goin' to walk off," he said, looking at Sidney with cunning malevolence: "we're a-goin' to walk in."

"No, you're not," said Sidney, bending forward, and looking his enemy squarely in the eye. "Not a man of you gets in here to-night."

"By the livin' Lord, we'll see about that!" a big fellow shouted from behind. "Come on, boys."

There was a yell of defiance, and twelve or fifteen men rushed forward, while a number of others, anxious to witness a row, but unwilling to participate in it, stood back and cheered them on.

"Ef old Dean was here, he'd stop this racket pretty quick," Sidney heard his tobacco-chewing friend say. For himself, he was so inspired with rage and detestation that he lost all thought of fear. With a bound, he had sprung through the window, on the broad ledge outside.

"You cowards!" he cried, "you miserable cowards!" His eyes blazed, and his hands were clinched. His new ally had clambered to his side with the sleek

agility of a cat, and stood confronting his mates. There was a murmur of surprise at this, and an indecisive pause.

"Yes, boys, I'm on his side. He's the gamiest little cock I ever see, and he ain't goin' to get no hurt ef I kin help it."

The men sneered and swore at this a little.

"We don't want to hurt him," one of them cried out, after a moment's parleying. "Let him clear out and mind his business. It's the superintendent we're after."

"The superintendent ain't here, boys; give ye my word, he ain't here," their comrade said, in a mollifying tone.

His listeners were a little staggered at this, but only for a moment. "That Bill Dakin likes lyin' almost as well as he does terbacker," Sidney heard one of them say.

"All right," the Hercules of the crowd replied, in stentorian tones: "if he ain't there, then we sha'n't hurt him; but we'll come and see for ourselves." There was another yell at this, and a second rush forward. Two or three stones crashed through the window above Gale's head, and the man of the evil countenance drew a rusty revolver from his pocket. Sidney braced himself. A fierce, savage joy possessed him. He felt that he could easily brain each man in turn who should dare lay hands on him. The stranger at his side spat on his hands, and prepared for action. Just then a strange thing happened.

Across the charred roadway, lit by a few gleaming

torches, flitted the figure of a young woman. She was bare-headed, her fair hair blown backwards by the wind. A small red cape covered her shoulders. She ran breathlessly up the low flight of steps leading to the main entrance of the Works, and, when at the top, turned to face the angry crowd below.

"Men! men! what are you doing?" she cried, in a sweet, piercing tone of rebuke. "Oh, go home. I beg you to go home. I am Maggie Dean — Thomas Dean's daughter," she ended, stretching out her arms, as if invoking them by some mystic spell.

To Maggie it seemed as if she should always be "named and known by that hour's deed." She had sealed the bond of fate, thrown in her lot with that of the class in which she was born. The faces of many of these hard-working men had been familiar to her since childhood; some of them were her father's friends and associates. If any of them were to commit a lawless act, she should suffer from it, she felt, as if it were her own. Their disgrace would be her father's and hers, — as their wrongs and sufferings, she now saw, should be hers also. Nothing on earth mattered so much to her now as the right behavior of these rough, ignorant men. The poor, vain wish to be different from what she was had disappeared; while certain facts in her past history, which had stood out before in momentous prominence, — the fact that Judge Foster had wished to marry her, and that Rector Fay had misused her, — seemed of infinitesimal consequence.

"Oh, friends," she began again, bending towards them, "it was my father sent me here. You all know my father," her voice breaking. "He is so sorry for any injustice done you. He wants to help you — he will help you; but he cannot if you get angry and do wrong things. I know how hard it is for some of you to get along, but you only make it harder when you behave like this. You make other people distrust and look down on us, and say cruel, untrue things of us. I beg you to go home," she entreated them again. "I beg you to go home."

If the angel of judgment had suddenly dropped down in their midst, the men could not have been more astonished. They were utterly routed and defeated. Those who had refrained from joining the attacking party now gathered about Maggie, praising and admiring.

"Three cheers for Thomas Dean!" one of them cried, and the night air rang with the response.

"Three cheers for Thomas Dean's darter!" another said, and this was given with a will. Maggie laughed and cried, and waved her handkerchief, still urging them to go home.

"We'll see you home first," one of them made gallant response, and she had difficulty to prevent them from executing this purpose.

"Mr. Dakin will go with me," she said at last, turning to that not very respectable individual, who looked the gratification he felt at this distinction. He had never been called "Mr." before.

The crowd good-naturedly dispersed, and Maggie descended the steps. At the foot she came face to face with Sidney Gale. This was the first knowledge she had of his presence. She had seen his figure outside the window, but had taken it for the superintendent's, his face being in shadow.

"Mr. Gale!" she exclaimed, drawing back in surprise. Now that her venturesome act was accomplished, she found something in it to annoy her. Certainly it was not pleasant to think Sidney Gale had witnessed it.

"That was magnificently done, Miss Dean," he burst out, impetuously. "There's no knowing what would have happened next if you hadn't rushed in as you did. By George! I never saw anything like it. Litchfield owes you a vote of thanks."

"I don't want a vote of thanks," she replied, hurriedly. She was anxious to escape, but he stood directly in her way. Bill Dakin, waiting near by, looked at them a few moments; then, shrewdly surmising his services as escort would not be needed, lounged off in the other direction, solacing himself with a fresh bite of his precious plug. Maggie saw him depart with a little displeasure, silently submitting to Gale's company, who took his place at her side.

"How did you happen to be here?" she asked, as they moved slowly down the road.

"I thought I had better be on hand in case my friend needed me," was the answer.

"Mr. Lewis is your friend? I don't think you

are to be congratulated on your choice," said Maggie, with the girlish sarcasm he remembered so well.

"Friendship is like some other things. You're not always fully informed of your choice until you've made it."

"He has treated these men shamefully," she said, indignantly, "and is perfectly insufferable besides." Gale made a feeble attempt to defend the absent superintendent.

"Of course, you must stand by him," she replied. "I'll admit, however, that he is no coward. He could never have faced that crowd of enraged men as he did."

"I don't think I understand."

"Why, as he stood there outside the office window. Did you see that man with a pistol?"

"Yes, I saw him."

"You had better tell your friend that justice is as essential a quality for a good superintendent, as courage."

"I'll tell him."

They had reached the gate, and Maggie passed inside. As she turned to say good-night, he extended his hand.

"By Heaven! Miss Dean, you don't begin to know what a splendid piece of work you've done!" he exclaimed, a strong current of warm emotion rushing over him. "Those fellows were ready to do anything. You — you saved my life."

"Saved your life!" Maggie repeated, in the

greatest surprise, and trying to withdraw her hand. "What do you mean?"

"Well, you see Lewis wasn't the only one in danger," he stammered. "I — I can't explain very well, but it makes no difference. It doesn't concern you to know it as much as it does me, anyway."

"How could I have saved your life, when I didn't know you were there?" she demanded.

"Oh, I'm willing to acquit you of the intention," he answered, with a melancholy smile. "But never mind. What I wanted to say was that there isn't another young woman I know would have dared do such a thing. But you know what I've always thought of you."

"Mr. Gale!"

"Oh, I know I'm a great fool to say it now, — but it's true. There never was a girl like you. Of course, I know you don't care a rush for me, and never could."

"Mr. Gale, I don't wish you to speak to me in that way. You have no right."

"Why, because there is some one else? Then, I hope he'll deserve his good fortune."

"I didn't mean that. I — I must go in now."

"Wait a minute. Are you angry?"

"No — not angry" —

"Then, shake hands," again taking hers in his. "Good-night. God bless you!" he said, and his voice choked a little, "but remember what I've said. There never was a girl like you, — there never

will be." He pressed her hand in both his, bent suddenly and kissed it, then turned and left her.

Henry Parsons, standing in the shadow not far off, was witness to this little scene, and, newly hurt and despairing, returned heart-sick to his lonely room at the hotel.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A BETTER UNDERSTANDING.

In spite of the crippled condition succeeding his accident, Thomas Dean had kept up a lively interest in the Works, and a feeling of personal accountability for everything going on there. He had been greatly distressed over the late troubles, sympathizing with his old friends and comrades, but cautioning them against extreme measures, and giving them much prudent counsel. They listened respectfully and promised to heed his advice; but, outside with their mates again, the men's sense of wrong broke out anew, and their wise resolutions were forgotten. There were times when, sitting in his wheeled chair, surrounded by friends proud to do him the least service, Thomas Dean felt like a king. Since the accident, he had grown to be a popular idol among his fellow-townsmen; but who would not rather be a living actor among his kind than raised to a place of useless worship? He was not ungrateful, but he felt that he had lost his true place and chance in the world. When he heard of the mistakes the men made, and saw their readiness to follow irresponsible leaders, his physical ruin seemed but the symbol of lost moral power, and he bitterly felt that his authority and influence were at an end.

As Saturday night drew near, it was pitiful to see him. All day he had been filled with nervous fears, painfully shifting from one position to another, as he sat imprisoned in his chair, bending his head in anxious thought on the shrunken hands clasping his stick, and letting many a troubled sigh escape him. In the early evening, Maggie wheeled his chair near the open door, where he could look across the bridge, in the direction of the Works, and observe what was going on. He made her take the lamp into the kitchen, that he might see outside objects better. A young moon was rising and shed a faint light over the surrounding landscape.

Maggie and her father were alone, her mother having taken her turn to visit Helen shortly after the celebration. When the men took up their line of march, and he caught sight of their dark forms under the red torchlights, the engineer's anxiety grew intense. It was hardly relieved by the long silence that followed during Sidney Gale's peaceful prosecution of his task, especially as he could see that the men were still hanging about the place. His heart boded mischief.

"What are they doing?" he asked, impatiently. "Why don't they go home if they've got their pay?"

"Perhaps they haven't got their pay," Maggie said, standing behind his chair and looking out on the strange scene.

"Then, things'll get a mighty sort worse than they be now. Don't Myron Lewis know he can't fool with men like that?"

"Dear father, don't worry so," said Maggie, bending over him. "You will make yourself ill. It isn't your fault if there's trouble."

"Yes, it is — it is the fault of every one of us. It'll be an everlastin' disgrace to the Works if any mischief's done. And there ain't no need. It had oughter be stopped."

"Well, father, you know you did try."

"Hark! What's that!" he exclaimed, as the first shout of the men, bent on paying a visit of vengeance to the superintendent's office, reached their ears. "They're goin' to fight! I know it. Lord in heaven, what fools men be! And I must sit here. I won't do it — I" — He bent forward, leaning his whole weight on his stick, struggling to rise, then fell back weakly. "I can't," he groaned. "I can't. And there's nobody to tell 'em. They don't know what they're doin', and there's nobody to tell 'em."

Maggie had never seen her slow, undemonstrative father in such a state as this. She looked at him in amazement. She was also frightened at the probable effects of this excitement; but for a moment this feeling was overlaid by another, the infection of his. His indignation and alarm became hers, and his righteous purpose flamed anew in her own breast.

"I will go, father. I will speak to them."

"You!" he exclaimed. Then, as he caught the brave flash of her eye, and the look of ardent resolve mantling her face, his own brightened.

"Yes — go — go," he said. "Tell them — tell them" —

"Never mind! I'll tell them you sent me," she said, not pausing for instructions, but flinging the little red cape over her shoulders, and running down the steps. The next moment, she was speeding down the road.

A second shout reached the old man, now sitting alone at home. This time it had a sinister sound, that sent a new fear, like a dagger, through his heart. His Maggie — he had sent her into danger! What could a child like that do in a crowd of infuriated men? She would be rudely jostled and insulted, struck by some passing missile perhaps, and brought back to him hurt and bleeding. This sudden revulsion of thought was maddening, and he groaned aloud. A moment after, a young man ran up the steps and stood before him in the open doorway. He had sought the house by a shorter path leading through the little orchard, and so missed sight of Maggie.

"Thank God, you have come!" exclaimed Thomas Dean. "Go after her, bring her back. Let the fools burn the whole town, if they want to."

"What do you mean?" Henry Parsons asked, looking at the other in dull consternation.

"I mean Maggie — my little girl, Maggie. She's down there in that crowd of yelling madmen. I let her go. God forgive me. She'll be killed — she — Man alive, are you never going?" he asked, bringing his stick, with heavy force, to the floor, to emphasize his commands.

Parsons, who had stood staring at him with astounded and fear-struck countenance, wheeled sharply

about, and the next instant was flying in the direction of the Works. When he reached the scene of action, he saw Maggie standing at the top of the steps, speaking to the crowd of men below. He had been thoroughly frightened, and the re-action of finding her safe overcame him a moment, and he leaned dizzily against a tree for support. He kept himself in shadow, for he feared to displease Maggie by letting her see him. He could not hear what she was saying, but the admiring shouts of the men told how it was received. After the crowd dispersed and she ran down the steps, he came out from his hiding-place, meaning to join her. He stopped short when he saw some one emerge from the building's shadow and speak to her, for he recognized Sidney Gale. He was ashamed of himself, but to save his life he felt he could not help retracing his steps and keeping them in sight. He was a witness to the parting interview at the gate, saw Gale take Maggie's hand in his and bend to print a lover-like salute on it; but what hurt him most was to observe how Maggie remained a moment in her place after her companion had left her, bending forward in the dim moonlight to look after him. When she turned and passed into the house, he had no wish or motive to follow.

It was evident enough now that Maggie had always loved Sidney Gale. Some quarrel or misunderstanding had kept them apart, which now seemed drawing to an end. If they were not accepted lovers, that parting scene at the gate indicated they soon would be. It was her feeling for another man, and not, as he had

once or twice wildly hoped, the dawn of a new sentiment towards her boy-lover of the past, that lay at the bottom of her variable and perplexing treatment of himself.

Maggie had found it difficult to regulate her behavior towards this returned friend, and occupied herself with many puzzling conjectures on his own manner and conduct. Henry Parsons had paid several visits at the house, since his return to Litchfield; but she never appropriated them to herself, giving her father the full credit and benefit of them. The two men played checkers together, and the younger told long stories of Western life and adventure, Maggie trying to go about her household tasks as usual.

Sometimes it seemed to her that their visitor addressed his remarks less to his immediate listener than to another, sitting apart, and only inferentially interested in the conversation. Occasionally, under some unaccountable impulse, she would join the talk, breaking through its masculine gravity with sprightly jests and sarcasms, addressed, apparently, to her father, but glancing off in another direction. Generally, however, she obeyed a different impulse, and kept, for her, strangely quiet. Once or twice only had she and Henry Parsons been left alone together, at which times Maggie's spirits either ran so high as to deprive her companion of breath and understanding, or deserted her altogether, so that she grew angry with herself for her foolish shyness. It was not the shyness that tempts a waiting lover, however, and to Parsons

she seemed at such times only distantly polite. Maggie wished now she had never seen the letters to Helen, and was tempted to burn them for the embarrassing remembrance they afflicted her with, and for the cheating intelligence they had conveyed. Parsons, on his side, true to his native habit of self-disparagement, reviewed his motives and conduct from the poorest point of view his melancholy imagination could find, and rebuked his folly in unsparing terms for returning to his old home at all. He could not correct the folly, but he could bring it to an end by leaving Litchfield at once. He went back to his hotel after the events described, to pack his trunk and inform his landlord that he should take the midnight train West on the following Sunday. He spent the next morning at church, and accepted Mrs. Fay's invitation to dine at the rectory.

Maggie did not go to church, not wishing to leave her father, who had not rested well and rose late. They ate a quiet dinner together, and he told her of Parsons's visit the night before. Maggie was newly disturbed at this news. Whatever Henry Parsons might think of her conduct, he would not, she felt sure, praise it as Sidney Gale had done; and failure to praise from this source Maggie had learned to construe into some measure of blame. In the afternoon she left her father in charge of a neighbor, who had come in to talk over the events of last evening, and went out for a walk along the Race. The air was full of autumn sunshine, and the woods shone in russet and gold, threaded with creepers of scarlet

woodbine. Maggie, in her brown dress and red cape, looked a part of the surrounding scene, and not unlike a forest dryad escaped from some shaggy tree-trunk near by. She came to the spot where a memorable conversation had been held, over two years ago. She had not called it hers since, and had fallen out of the habit of visiting the Race. Now she paused and looked around. Her old seat under the large oak had been destroyed. Two or three elms near by had been felled, depriving the place of its sheltered seclusion. She wanted to throw herself down in the sunny hollow between the stumps, but the situation was a little exposed, and she walked lingeringly on, the shallow stream flowing murmurously at her side.

Half a mile farther on, her ear caught the sound of footsteps approaching from the opposite direction. She did not know whether to go forward or to retrace her steps. The path was narrow, and the Race was sometimes the resort of unpleasant company. While she hesitated, a young man's figure emerged from behind a straggling blackberry bush, and she stood face to face with Henry Parsons. They looked at each other in mutual surprise and embarrassment, amounting almost to consternation. Parsons had taken a roundabout road from the rectory, past the big planing-mill that stood at one end of the town, through the wooded pasture that bordered the Race, to pay a farewell visit, he could not easily avoid, to his old friend.

"I — I was going to see your father," he said. "I am going away to-night."

"Going away — to-night!" she repeated, in the

utmost astonishment. Then, remembering she had no right to show such feeling, she summoned a less concerned manner when she spoke again.

"You go suddenly, do you not?"

"No — that is, yes; — but I have already overstaid my time."

There was nothing to do but turn and accompany him back to the house, though she did it reluctantly. The little stream seemed to plash and fall along its pebbled course with a noisier movement, jibing and laughing at them. The rap of a blue-jay's beak on a branch above their heads sounded like an advancing drum-beat, and every feature of the surrounding landscape took on a clearer distinctness to eye and ear.

"Time is a very precious article in Dakota, I suppose," Maggie said, with a touch of her old-time mockery. If she must talk at all, it must be in her own fashion.

"I don't know," was the absent reply. "I have sometimes been compelled to dispose of mine at a rather heavy discount."

His listener did not choose to follow the lead of remarks like this, and remained silent.

"I saw you last night," he said, turning abruptly towards her. She blushed furiously.

"I mean when you were speaking to those men," he added, confusedly. "Your father was frightened and sent me to find you," he explained.

"Yes, I know," she replied, hurriedly, anxious to dismiss the topic.

"It was fine," he said, in a voice trembling with

suppressed feeling; "it was inspiring. I shall never forget it, nor how you looked as you stood there."

"It was nothing," she said. "I couldn't help it, so I deserve no praise. I'm glad, of course, if I prevented a disturbance. I felt if anything happened I should never get over it."

"If anything had happened to Sidney Gale, that is," her companion silently interpreted.

"Do you think Mr. Lewis will treat the men better after this?" she asked, to keep up the talk, and glad of a safe topic.

"He won't get the chance." She looked her failure to understand this remark.

"Don't you know Lewis left for Chicago on the midnight train?" he asked. "He couldn't do anything else, after proving himself the miserable coward he did."

"Coward!" she repeated, in surprise.

"I call a man a coward who refuses to perform a duty, and lets his friend face the danger he dare not. But I doubt if Mr. Gale finds further use for such a friendship."

"Mr. Gale! Do you mean Mr. Gale took his friend's place last night?"

"Didn't you know it?" Parsons asked, bewildered.

"And was it he I saw facing that crowd of angry men?"

He then related to her the whole story of the night's proceedings. Maggie listened with suspended breath and changing color.

"What must he think of me?" she murmured.

"How blind I was — how unjust!" The man at her side felt more perplexed and hopeless than before. Maggie was lost in repentant thoughts a few moments.

"What strange and unfair mistakes we make about people!" she said at last, in a regretful tone.

"Yes, we sometimes make mistakes," the other replied, mechanically.

"But, after all, perhaps it is only fair," she added, brightening a little. "People make cruel mistakes about us sometimes." She was thinking of Mrs. Briggs and Rector Fay, but the one who heard her could not but take this as a direct reference to himself.

"Will you never forgive me for that?" he asked, quickly.

"Forgive you for what?" Then, catching his meaning in his look, she stammered an explanation. "I did not mean that; — I — I was thinking of something else."

They had reached a spot where three stumps of new-felled trees enclosed a sunny hollow covered with dead grass. He stopped and looked about him with a doubtful air.

"Yes, it is the same place," he said, in a low tone, catching sight of a tangled rosebush that had caught Maggie's dress that day. "Yet it seems changed."

"They have cut down some trees," she replied, in as matter-of-fact a tone as she could summon.

"You are right. We make strange mistakes — fatal mistakes. I thought you were vain and selfish,

though I loved you, for all that. But now I see it was I who was selfish, and tyrannical, as you said. I was always teasing and troubling you, wanting to gather up all your sweetness and brightness for myself. Now I see I had no more right or power to do that than to gather up the sunshine and imprison it in my trunk."

This turn in the talk startled Maggie, and she stood flushing and trembling. Such love-making was very sweet and touching, but she did not quite know what to do with a homage offered in so abased a spirit. And it is difficult to reply to a lover who speaks in the past tense.

"And that other time — I must speak of that. I shall never forget my brutal conduct that day. I was mad and full of despair. You can never forgive it, I know. I do not deserve you should."

He would fall down and roll himself in the dust next, she was afraid. She kept quite still. The air, too, was full of the brooding stillness of late September. A yellow leaf fluttered downwards. She caught and held it in her hand.

"They don't seem so important, our mistakes about people," she said at last, "after we have — have corrected them. If your bad opinion of me has changed, I shall have to forgive you, of course."

This seemed a very bold speech to the one uttering it, and she tried to cover it with a little archness.

"I never had a bad opinion of you."

"Oh, now you are growing inconsistent."

"You are the woman I love. What does a man's

opinion of a woman matter after he has said that?" Maggie thought it did matter a little, but could not say so, her heart standing still to hear what should follow.

"The thought of you is as deeply implanted in me as the instinct of life itself — is part of that instinct. Without you I only half live — rather, I do not live at all. I only exist." A silence followed, but his listener could not break it.

"I don't know whether I meant to tell you this again or not. I must have known I should if the chance ever presented itself. A man can't talk nothings to the only woman who for him has any existence. If I must not speak what my heart is full of, I must not speak to you at all."

Maggie wondered why he thought he had been forbidden.

"You need not give yourself the pain of answering me," he went on, with saddest resignment. "I know how you dislike to hurt any one, — even me. But I shall never trouble you again. I am going away. I should like to say good-by here."

She started, a quick pang of fear darting through her. He was going, — in a moment would be gone, and he had given her no chance to hinder him. What can a woman do with a lover who declares himself in this fashion, whose words of love are of that self-renunciatory order that continually hold her away from him?

"Are you not going in to see father?" she asked, hesitatingly, catching at this little excuse for the detention of a purpose she knew she must prevent the

execution of in some way. He gave a little start of recollection. "I will see your father, of course."

Their eyes caught each other, hers with a timid, pleading look, pierced the next moment with a roguish gleam that spread and overran in silent laughter.

"Maggie!" he exclaimed, in quick, glad entreaty, stepping towards her with outstretched hands, but not daring to touch her yet.

"How can I answer when I've not been asked anything?" she said, with a tremulous smile, and raising her hand to keep him back. He caught it, and drew her towards him; and there, by the little stream, on whose banks they had set up housekeeping so many times when they were children, they replighted their troth. They had much to say to each other, and the sun was sending level beams through the trees when Maggie remembered her father.

"Oh, what a wicked girl I am!" she cried, springing from the ground where they were sitting. "He is alone. We must go in at once. You must tell him," she added, as they drew near the house.

They found him dozing in his chair. "What a shame, father, for me to leave you so long!" she said, bending penitently over him. "Here is Mr. Parsons, — come to say good-by," she added, in a lower tone, and casting a mischievous glance over her shoulder.

"Henry, — Henry here?" her father said, slowly rousing himself. "Well, you didn't find Maggie last night?" he added, as the young man stepped forward and took his hand.

"No, but I found her to-day." He put out his hand and drew Maggie towards him. "I don't mean to lose her again," he said.

Thomas Dean looked at them. His face quivered with emotion. "Maggie!" he exclaimed, "and Henry too! We've always wanted it so — your mother and me, but lately — we didn't know" —

"Father!" cried Maggie, sinking on her knees at his side, "I am the worst girl in the world, to think of leaving you," and burst into excited tears.

"'Twon't be easy, for a fact, — that part won't," he replied, a regretful look creeping over his face, and laying his hand on the bright head. "But I shall have your mother."

"We'll take you out to Dakota with us," said Parsons, encouragingly. The older man shook his head. He was past the time of transplanting; his roots had struck too deep in his present soil. He kissed Maggie and bade her dry her tears.

Parsons staid as late as only a lover dares, then went back to his hotel to report a change of plans, and say that his return West was indefinitely postponed. Maggie wrote the news to her mother, who was well content, but newly aggrieved at the prospect of a second hurried wedding. She returned home at once. Helen was also pleased, and felt all her anxieties about Maggie at an end. John Norton, never having seen Henry Parsons, man-like, withheld his opinion, writing Maggie a scolding letter for daring to commit such an important act without consulting him.

"John Norton is the best man I know," she said, speaking with deliberation, and folding the letter she had just read to her lover.

He smiled in an untroubled fashion. "I'm perfectly willing he should be, so long as he is married to Helen."

"Yes, he just suits Helen." A look of amused recollection broke over her face. "I had such a queer fancy about Helen once," she said, looking at him demurely. "Didn't you and she use to correspond?"

He hesitated a moment, then admitted they did. She smiled provokingly.

"I asked her to write because I wanted to hear about you," he explained.

"How very flattering! — to her, I mean; but Helen is capable of any amount of self-sacrifice. I've always been a trial to her, until she got married. Then she handed me over to John."

"I feel like having it out with 'John.' What is it you admire him so much for, anyway?"

"Well, in the first place," leaning leisurely back in her low rocker, and preparing to descant on a favorite theme, "he has the broadest mind of any man I know. Of course, women don't count. They're intense, but not broad."

"I think I've heard that observation before. Do you think Miss Graham would agree with you?"

"No, because she is herself too marked an example. I don't mean he is a remarkable scholar, or even, perhaps, the profoundest thinker, but he is so

hospitable in his thought. He has positively no prejudices."

"I hope that isn't because he has no convictions."

"He has plenty of convictions, but he is willing other people should have theirs. Then, he is so good, without trying to be, you know, or making other people painfully conscious of his superiority. And so delicate-minded, like a woman; and honorable, like a man; and with the best manners in the world, and a perfect temper;—and he isn't afraid of a little fun, if he is a minister, and, and—isn't that enough?"

"It will do. I think he deserves to marry us. When shall we ask him to do it?"

Maggie had tried to be wilful on this point, and fix a day somewhere near the close of the century; but Parsons let it be understood that he did not mean to go back to Dakota without her, and she was persuaded, at least, to an early date in November, not wishing, she said, to imperil the interests of the rising territory by keeping him away too long.

Mrs. Dean declared she had more than a dozen pairs of hands could do in the busy weeks that followed; nor did she find Maggie the most ready assistant, who liked the task of sewing no better because of its connection with a wedding outfit. But she liked visiting with her lover. They went nutting together, and took long, dreamful walks through the October woods; and the better acquaintance they thus derived of each other fitted them as well, perhaps, for duties to come as if Maggie had spent all her time in hemming ruffles.

She had a rather vague idea of the kind of life she should lead in Dakota, or her lover's position. He was not very communicative about himself, and she did not like to ask questions.

One day he put a diamond ring on her finger. She was greatly surprised. She had not supposed Henry Parsons would approve of diamonds, even if he could afford to buy them. She turned her finger about, to catch the glitter of the broken rays, with childlike delight, while he watched her with a man's superior gravity. Then she ceased to admire, and began to scold him for his extravagance. He defended himself by saying he didn't intend to be engaged but once.

"A plain gold would have done just as well," she said, severely, "and could have been used for a wedding ring besides."

"But being married is quite different from being engaged. Each event is important, and deserves its separate symbol. I wonder why they select the plainer one for the final ceremony?"

"Because in marriage you come down to plain, practical life," she answered, with an experienced air. "Before that all is glittering hope and expectation," lifting her finger to catch the pretty sparkle of the stone once more.

"No, it is because the plain gold stands for simple truth and perfection," her lover replied. "Shall we buy our furniture in Chicago?" he asked, a few minutes later.

"Furniture!" exclaimed Maggie. "I didn't know

we were to have any — at first." He smiled, and said he thought they had better lay in a few chairs.

"Have you written to engage a house?" she asked him, during this discussion.

"Oh, I engaged the house before I came away."

She dropped her sewing and looked at him. They were sitting on the little side-porch, and Maggie was trying to help her mother.

"I own a house, you know, — two or three, in fact; but I built this one — on purpose," he ended, with a slight smile.

"On purpose for what?" she demanded.

"To have an excuse for thinking about you. It's a two-story-and-basement brick, with Queen Anne front. They're beginning to build in city style out there. I don't know as you'll like a house in a block, but if you don't we'll build another."

All this sounded very opulent to Maggie, but she did not mean to be overcome. She looked at him with severe thoughtfulness a moment.

"I don't think I approve of your being so successful, — at least, not so quick. I've heard that the slowest successes are the surest."

"I haven't been unduly successful, I think. Some of the houses are not paid for. There's our famous citizen, Colonel White, — he made three millions in two years."

"I call that perfectly wicked," said Maggie, who had read Karl Marx with Miss Graham, and become imbued with some levelling ideas.

"Yes, I should feel a little culpable for that, my-

self. But Colonel White isn't a bad man. He has done a great deal of good with his money. He's going to build us a university. He is a distant relative of Mr. Danvers." Maggie took up her sewing.

"Do you admire Laura Danvers as much as everybody else?" she asked.

"I don't admire everybody else."

"As much as everybody else admires her, I mean."

"I don't know," was the careless reply. "She seems a sensible young woman. She congratulated me very prettily on our engagement, the other day. She said you and she were in the same class together, and that you were the brightest scholar there."

"I'm much obliged to her; but she was the most thorough. Then, you approve of young women studying medicine?"

"I never thought much about it. Young women in the abstract haven't interested me much," with his grave smile.

"It's just as Miss Graham says: we shall never get men to think as seriously on these subjects as women do," she said, with a discouraged accent.

"They are not the men's affairs."

"That is your superficial way of looking at it. If a woman wants to get into a carriage, a man thinks that is his affair, and opens the door for her; but if she wants to go to college, he says that isn't his affair, and tells her to build one for herself."

"Did you want to go to college?" he asked, a little uneasy, as men are apt to become when the woman they care for talks in this strain.

"Miss Graham did," was the deft response. "Miss Graham admires Laura Danvers beyond anything," relapsing into her girlish speech. "She is very much disappointed in me."

"I should like to know why?" her lover inquired, in a disapproving tone.

"Well, I'm not going to study medicine. I'm only engaged to be married. And, then, I lost my school"—

"Did she blame you for that?"

"Not really blame me, perhaps, but she couldn't help being disappointed. People's misfortunes are laid up against them, as well as their faults. She had depended on me to introduce the Froebel system in Litchfield."

"Well, I'm not disappointed in you," her listener said, bending over and catching her hand in his a moment.

Another talk, which took place shortly before their marriage, was of a different character. They had gone out, one evening, on an errand for Maggie's mother, and, returning, passed the place where he was born. The moon was in her first quarter, sending a tender radiance over everything, and touching the dilapidated little cottage with a new pathos and even a little beauty. The gate had long since dropped from its fastenings, and, without speaking, — following an unusual impulse, for he generally avoided the spot, — Parsons led Maggie inside.

She was a little surprised. She had always known, of course, that this was her lover's birthplace and early home, and that the shadow of deep

sorrow and misfortune hung over it; but these facts had never taken strong hold of her consciousness, nor could she know what struggling emotions of grief, despair and shame were at work in the heart of her companion. To-night these feelings were softened a little by Maggie's presence and the knowledge of her love, but also a little imbittered. His own past seemed so desolate and bare beside hers. It was a spotted name and lineage she would receive from him, — redeemed slightly, perhaps, by his own industrious effort, but bearing always a shamed regret for the past, and menace towards the future.

She had seated herself on the decaying doorstep, waiting for him to speak, and wondering why he had brought her there, while he stood near, with arms folded moodily across his breast, and gave himself up to his own dark thoughts. A deep sigh escaped him. She rose and laid her hand on his arm.

"What is it?" she asked gently, looking up at him in the pale light, and catching sight of his troubled countenance. He covered her hand with his.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, with a slight shudder, "I sometimes think I dare not call or make you mine. A horrible threatening cloud hangs over me, and I seem to see I shall do you nothing but harm."

"Harm — do me harm?" she repeated, in a puzzled tone.

"My father was an outcast among men. What right has the son to hope to become anything better — to escape the sin and misery he has fallen heir to? They tell me that when he married my mother

he was as promising a young man as any other. My mother loved and trusted him, yet almost at once he began drinking, and from that time was a ruined man. Some little seed of vice, planted no one knows when or where, but as much a part of the family heritage, perhaps, as this dark skin of mine, took sudden root and grew like the poisonous Upas, until it sapped and strangled every quality of manhood in him. I tell you," gripping her hand until he hurt her, "no man knows what power of evil is in him, nor when some sly opportunity will reveal him for what he is, a weak coward or a villain. And when I think of my mother" — his voice broke. "It is always the woman who suffers most in such cases. My God!" taking her face in his hands, and bending it upwards, "I would rather never see you again than make you suffer like that." She looked at him with startled and terrified eyes. Never had she imagined the possibility of a scene like this.

"Oh, hush!" she said. "Don't say such things! I didn't know you had such dreadful thoughts. They are wicked, and you frighten me."

This outburst past, he grew quiet, and folded his arm protectingly about her, to shield her from her fear of himself.

"You are morbid — you don't know what you are saying. We ought not to have come this way."

"I love you so much," he said, not heeding her, and speaking with mournful tenderness, "that it would be far easier to give you up now than to give you a day's unhappiness."

"Oh, how wildly you talk!" she said, with a little sob. "I never saw you like this. Let us go away from this place."

"What use?" he drearily asked. "It is here. I see it always. I can never get rid of the thought of it. I tell you no man has the right to bestow such a heritage of undeserved wrong and suffering on a child, as my father did," he broke out again, "to make him almost curse the day he was born," he went on, with increasing excitement, "to make his own memory only a cause of loathing and shame, to"— Maggie heard these words with a new fear and a great moral shock. She quickly freed herself from her lover, and stood facing him with large, reproachful eyes.

"Oh, how wicked you are!" she said. "Hush!" as he looked down at her in astonishment, and tried to speak. "I will not let you talk like that. It is wrong and cruel, and besides it is not true."

"Not true," he repeated, in a wondering tone.

"Nothing is true that is only half true, and nothing is so wicked as to turn against those who truly belong to us, who have given us life. They are ours always, no matter what faults and hardship they bring us. Your father is your father."

He looked at her in stupefied surprise, mingled with rising awe. Maggie had spoken with that strong, impulsive energy which comes from heart-moving conviction, as if she had suddenly reached some divine conclusion which belonged not to her listener alone.

"I am not angry," she said, bending towards him in atonement of words that might have sounded harsh, the moonlight falling on her upturned face, "and I am sorry. I am sorry for you. But! oh! never talk like that again," with earnest appeal in voice and eyes. "Never think such thoughts. They make you seem so hard. You should not have harsh thoughts of him, you who are so strong. He may have suffered, too, and he was weak. Miss Graham says such things are a disease."

"That does not hinder disgrace from following."

"Now you are thinking only of yourself," she sweetly reproached him. "Nothing can disgrace or hurt us but our own wrong-doing, Mrs. Fay once told me. And he is your father. There must have been good as well as evil in him, and he has given you nothing but the good. You should remember that."

Parsons had never been preached to in this way before, and it gave him a new feeling, indescribably strange and sweet, to have Maggie for the preacher, who did not always take higher moral ground than he did. The womanly compassion in her words moved him in a new way, stirring pity and love where feelings of injury and loss had reigned; but the logical truth of what she had uttered struck deeper still. Her quick insight had reached higher ground than his coarse reasoning could.

"You are better than I am," he said humbly, "and you are right. I will never think or speak ill of him again." She took his arm and pressed it in kindly pardon.

"Don't think I don't understand," she whispered. "You have been lonely all your life, and obliged to stand outside many things you felt you needed and had a right to. I know just how you feel. But I seem to see things so differently of late. We cannot change ourselves much, — our real, inward selves, I mean; and when we learn to look at things right, we don't want to, because we see how truly we belong and are needed in our present place, and of how little use we should be anywhere else."

Serious discourse like this was unlike the talk Maggie used to indulge in two years ago, and it fell a little strangely on her lover's ears now; but this new knowledge he was gaining of her day by day only added a deepening surprise and joy to his love.

They walked slowly towards the gate. Outside, they turned to look back.

"The place has been sold again," he said, "and the man who has bought it is to build. Soon everything will be changed."

"Then, we will say 'good-by,'" she said, and waved her hand towards the little house. The other lifted his hat. Moved by the same impulse, and under the same tide of warm, exalted feeling which had seized her a few moments before, Maggie laid her cheek on the weather-beaten gate-post. "He is sorry," she said, in a low, caressing tone. "He will not do it again;" and her words seemed to carry an accent of forgiveness, besought and granted at the same moment.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A SHOWER OF RICE.

THE reconciliation between Maggie and Bertha Fay was effected as completely as such reconciliations are apt to be. The two came together, inspired by the single desire to take up their former friendship at the point where it had ended two years before; but this proved not easy, though Bertha suffered less disappointment than Maggie. Her easy temperament contentedly accepted the good she had, without those subtle questionings and doubts Maggie had learned to indulge in. She rejoiced in the new possession of her friend, whom she found the same bright, frank, loving Maggie as of old. Maggie, however, was conscious of a vague disappointment, though displeased with herself for recognizing it. It was not that Bertha had changed so much, as that she seemed to have stood still. She had once been the more womanly of the two, Maggie remembered; better behaved, and with a more careful judgment, — which Maggie often acted on in place of her own, making Bertha, as she had said, her "walking conscience." She was womanly still, and her manners were all right, of course; but a certain childlike quality inhered in all her words and actions, which her critics might perhaps have attributed to dulness or to a slight moral inertia. Bertha had grown quite stout,

and the task of carrying about so much unnecessary flesh perhaps hindered the free operation of mental instincts. She had inherited this physical feature from her father, who had early shown a slight tendency to corpulence; but as he never showed anything but a tendency anywhere, it stopped here in an incipient stage.

Maggie's disappointment in her old friend began with the knowledge of Bertha's engagement to Judge Foster. She could not understand it, nor Bertha's way of talking about it.

"Were you surprised?" the latter asked, after she had confided her open secret to the latter.

They were sitting together in Maggie's room, under the sloping roof. Maggie was conscious of hesitating longer than she should for a suitable reply.

"It would be only natural," Bertha said, composedly. "He is so much older than I."

"I don't suppose that makes any difference if — if you care for him," was the reply.

"Of course I care for him," the other said, with a little dignity. "He has been most kind and attentive. Papa is very much pleased."

"I should think he would be." Maggie felt a little guilty over the ambiguous nature of this remark, but she knew not what else to say. "And your mother, how does she feel about it?"

"Mamma was more surprised than any one, I think. She cried a good deal when I told her. She will miss me, you know; but she has a great respect for Judge Foster."

The scene between mother and daughter, thus hinted at, deserves further description.

"Do you love him, Bertha?" her mother asked, clasping her child in her arms, but holding her back from her a little, that she might look at her.

"Oh, yes, I think so, mamma," was the undisturbed reply.

"Marriage is such a very solemn thing, my daughter. Nothing but the purest, strongest love justifies it. You do not have to marry, Bertha. It is nothing against a girl if she remains single. You are not acting from any such wrong and foolish motive as that, I hope."

"Of course not, mamma, though I think papa would be disappointed if I were never to marry. I shouldn't like to disappoint papa."

"It is right to try to please your father, but there is no hurry. You are young yet, Bertha; and your own feeling, — you owe it to Judge Foster, as well as to yourself, to think very carefully about that. Suppose he were poor and with no position, would you still wish to marry him?" The girl hesitated a moment.

"If he were very different from what he is, more like some one else than himself, I should not feel the same towards him, I suppose," she replied, a little crossly. Her mother turned disheartened away. She did not know how it was, but during the past two years she had seemed gradually to lose her hold on this daughter, — once nearer to her, she felt, than to any one else; but whose pliant disposition had yielded

more and more readily of late to her father's influence, whose society was more entertaining than her mother's, and who liked to profit by a pair of youthful hands and feet ready to do him service.

"Do you think love-matches are always the happiest, mamma?" Bertha continued, with an accent at once self-excusing and otherwise suggestive. "Of course, I shall love my husband; but papa says reason as well as love should be considered in marriage. I know girls who have married for love and been very unhappy." She knew something else besides. She had come to comprehend many things within the last two years that only grieved and puzzled her before. She knew her mother's had been a love-match.

"That is true, Bertha," the latter replied wearily. "Love may bring unhappiness, but there are worse things than such unhappiness, and one is the absence of all power or wish to love." The daughter did not understand this, and, a little hurt and offended, left the room. Afterwards, Mrs. Fay blamed herself, as she often had before, for undue severity. She did not lack in tenderness, only did not know always how to use it, but in this case she felt it would have been of no avail. There are degrees of moral enlightenment which each soul must find and fit to its own needs; and perhaps it is as unwise to feed the conscience, as the mind, beyond its present power of assimilation and growth. Bertha was by no means without a conscience. She would always be a good daughter, generous and kind, capable, in certain ways, of much self-sacrifice; but she was one of those in

whom the intellectual currents, deprived of some stated source of supply, flow more sluggishly from year to year, inevitably, if slowly, inducing a state of moral indifferentism. With Bertha gone, lost in a double sense, contentedly settling down into a life of luxury and ease, which her father would share and make his own in ways the mother could not, Mrs. Fay saw herself growing more lonely and farther apart from those nearest her, during the years to come.

The talk of the two girls in Maggie's chamber wandered off into reminiscences of their school-days, coming back to present events, and a pleased examination of each other's engagement ring.

"How strange we should be married so near together!" said Bertha. The date for her own wedding was fixed near Thanksgiving. "I did not suppose I should ever marry," she added, with engaging frankness, slipping the ring she had taken off back on her finger.

Maggie listened to her friend with growing wonder, trying to speak naturally in return, but finding it difficult.

"You see it isn't as if I had always had a great many admirers, like you, Maggie. No one ever cared for me before — in that way."

Maggie was touched at this. "You foolish old dear!" she cried, throwing her arms about her, "I didn't know I had so many admirers. I suspect I've spent more time thinking about people who didn't admire me."

"You haven't told me anything about Mr. Parsons," Bertha said, as she rose to go. "I've done all the talking."

"There isn't much to tell, except that he is a young man of very decided opinions, who has a way of frowning at you when you disagree with him, that I don't find very promising."

"Yes, I've heard papa say he was a very earnest character." "Tiresomely earnest" had been the rector's verdict, after the lately renewed acquaintance with his former *protégé*. "Judge Foster says he is sure to make his mark some day."

"Judge Foster is very kind," Maggie replied dryly. She supposed, satirically, the judge thought he had already made his mark.

"It's very romantic, your having known each other so long, and being little lovers when you were children. I don't suppose people would call mine a very romantic marriage," and she repeated what she had said to her mother, that love-matches were not always the happiest. Maggie thought it a part of friendship to agree to this, and supposed not.

"I'm not certain but there is more danger of quarrelling with your husband if you think a good deal of him, and that a little mutual indifference isn't the best guaranty for married peace and happiness."

"Now you are getting satirical, Maggie," her friend laughed, comfortably. "Fancy my ever disputing the opinion of Judge Foster! I shouldn't want to marry a man I couldn't look up to," she ended, a little primly.

"Oh, we all say that!" Maggie replied; "but the

necessity of always looking up on one side implies that of always looking down on the other, which would soon lead to a double set of aborted neck-muscles. I mean my husband shall look up to me in some things."

Maggie pondered a good deal over this reconstructed friendship. It hurt as well as surprised her to have Bertha act from a poorer standard than she would have chosen, and the missing sense of guiltiness in her friend seemed in some inexplicable way to have become hers; repentance for the sins of those we love being even a more difficult process than for our own. She could not refrain from imparting some of her troubled thoughts to Miss Graham.

"I don't understand it," she said: "when we were at school together, it was always Bertha who had better ideas about things than I had. She was so careful in little things, and had an unfailing sense of propriety. I was always making mistakes. She had to keep me in order — at least, tried to."

"Propriety is a very thin shaving of character," said Miss Graham. "Some of the most selfish and cruel people I know are the most punctilious in outward behavior. They know how to enter and leave a room, and wouldn't offend Mrs. Grundy for the world; but they have no more heart or moral aspiration than Poll over there."

Here that accomplished bird began to bob up and down on her perch and chatter volubly: "Polly wants a cracker."

"I know you do," said her mistress, "and that is

all you do want," upon which the mortified bird thrust her head under her wing and went to sleep. "We're always giving people of fine manners credit for a mind and conscience to match, and we make a mistake almost every time we do it. A young woman of gentle birth and breeding may have perfectly correct ideas on all the little forms of polite intercourse, yet show not a particle of sense or human sympathy on any other subject. She would never make the mistake of calling for soup twice, but she'd let a sister woman starve in the street rather than risk an offence to respectability by speaking to her."

"I'm sure that isn't like Bertha Fay at all," said Maggie, with a little indignation.

"I'm not talking about Bertha Fay," Miss Graham replied, and at once began to defend her. "I don't see any harm in her marrying Judge Foster if she wants to."

"Don't you see any harm in her wanting to?"

"Not necessarily. On the contrary, I regard that as a redeeming feature of the case. Sentiment is a good thing in marriage, of course; but love is an endowment, like any other qualification or talent. We don't blame a woman because she can't sing like Patti. Why should we blame her because she can't love like Juliet?"

"Then you think it is right for a woman to marry a man she doesn't love?"

"Right is relative."

"I wish you wouldn't talk like that," Maggie

made answer, in a disappointed tone. "It confuses me. I don't know what you mean."

"I mean it is foolish to judge a woman of the Hottentot tribe, who submits to being knocked down with a club by the man who wants to marry her, by the standards of to-day — not that those standards are so much improved."

"Bertha is not a woman of the Hottentot tribe."

"No, she is Rector Fay's daughter. He will be pleased with the marriage, I've no doubt. The judge gives good dinners, and the rector will make a very nice papa-in-law. Your friend is a good girl, I dare say," noting Maggie's downcast look, "but she is of the kind that inevitably settles down in life. She is too fond of the comfortable side of things. There ought to be more of her mother in her; but that's the risk a woman runs in marrying, the risk of bringing children into the world of the same disposition and habits as the man she's disappointed in."

It was a warm, golden day in early November, with a hint of the departed summer in the air, which seemed to have lingered to give them its blessing, when Henry Parsons and Maggie Dean stood up in the little parlor to be married. John Norton performed the ceremony. Thomas Dean sat near in his wheeled chair, his wife standing at his side, and a small company of friends ranged about the room. Maggie knelt down at her father's side to receive his kiss of benediction. There was a suspicious brightness in her eyes, as friends crowded about to extend

congratulations. Mrs. Dean escaped to the kitchen as soon as possible, ostensibly to occupy herself in material cares respecting the wedding breakfast, and preparations for Maggie's departure on the noon train, taking lengthened pains with the lunch-basket.

"I've put the cold chicken in a tin box," she said to Maggie, trying to speak in her usual brisk tones. "I should think there was enough to last two days." She would not look at her daughter, nervously fussing over the strap that secured the basket-cover.

"Yes, mother, that's all right." Maggie had run away from her place at her husband's side to say good-by to her mother here. She clasped her arms about her and held her imprisoned.

"Oh, I don't believe I want to go after all," she broke down, between a laugh and a sob, and hiding her face on her mother's shoulder. The latter stood quite erect, bent on not giving way, but winking hard to keep back the tears.

"I know I've been a bad girl and made you lots of trouble," she sobbed contritely.

"I wouldn't worry about it now," her mother said. "Have you got the blanket-shawl?" she added a moment after, pretending to arrange Maggie's collar, and letting this little subterfuge serve as excuse for keeping her arm about Maggie's neck.

"Yes, she's got the blanket-shawl," said Miss Graham, speaking for the one addressed, who could not trust her voice just then. She also had beat an early retreat to the kitchen. She thought weddings the most dismal affairs on earth.

"But it won't be long before we see each other," Maggie said, lifting her head, and wiping away her tears. "You and father are to come out to Dakota to visit us — Henry says so."

"That settles it, I suppose," her mother replied, "though you can't expect the rest of us to think the sun rises and sets with him, all in a minute."

Maggie laughed, and went back to her father. She did not try to restrain her tears here, as she knelt down at his side to receive his parting kiss, and felt his arms about her. The scene moved all present.

"Be good to her," the old man said, in trembling tones, to the young husband standing near and waiting to receive his own. "She's the best little girl in the world."

Henry Parsons promised, but with the vaguest understanding of the reason for such a request, or of the general scene around him. A wedding-day brings strange revelations. A man never feels himself of so little personal account as on the day of his marriage, when he seems a mere perfunctory device for carrying on an affair that cannot well go on without him, but in which his part is otherwise of little interest or importance. Parsons had looked forward to this day as one of crowning blessing and triumph, but now it seemed one of universal grief and desolation, and himself the luckless cause. He felt more like a marauding thief than a victorious lover when he saw Maggie's tears, and heard the lamentations of her friends over her departure. It seemed as if he should never be through these interminable tear-

ful leave-takings, but at last he had her beside him in the carriage, flushed, tearful and smiling. Her young friends stood grouped about, armed with all the old slippers they could find to throw after them. A shower of rice rattled on the carriage-top over their heads. By accident, or some sly contrivance of the bridegroom's, they were to ride to the station alone. The driver gathered up his reins, and, just as the horses moved, the first slipper was thrown, a soiled, useless thing, which flew through the carriage window and dropped on the seat opposite them. Maggie took up the battered little shoe and examined it.

"How strange!" she said, turning to her husband. "It is one of the same pair."

"The same pair?"

"That I had on the night of the class-reception." A ray of recollection shot across his face. He took the slipper from her, and, after looking at it a moment, put it carefully in an inside pocket. Something in this action, at once grave and tender, touched Maggie.

"Oh, I was very bad to you in those days," she said, leaning towards him. He bent and placed the seal of forgiveness on her lips, and would have repeated it, but she checked him, drawing herself decorously back into the corner of the carriage.

"I will tell you something," she said, a demure expression coming into her face. "If — if you had spoken then, I should not have said 'no' — perhaps."

"That was what I was afraid of," he replied, with a mischievous smile.

"Oh, indeed!" throwing herself back on the cush-

ioned seat. "How long ago that time seems," she added, reflectively, a moment after. "No, short. Which is it?" laughing.

"Short, now that it is over with," he answered.

"Yes. How strange it is that unhappiness seems never to have been, when once we have escaped it, so unreal! — One wonders what has become of it."

"It has sunk downwards to nourish the roots, like yesterday's rain, which we see no signs of to-day, except in a bluer sky and fresher landscape."

"I call that rather poetical," said Maggie.

"Oh, I'm a poet. Haven't I been living in Laura's vicinity for a month, and wasn't that all Petrarch required?" She encouraged this with a smile.

"I am not only a poet, but an artist. All I require is that Monna Lisa should consent to sit for her portrait. Or, if you prefer, I will turn orator like Pericles, if you will consent to play the part of Aspasia and the audience."

"Dear me!" Maggie murmured, "I should think I had married a distinguished character."

"Oh, I feel myself the finest fellow in the world," with a joyous accent.

"I'm glad you didn't add Dante to the rest. I don't think I would make a good Beatrice. I'm not dead."

"No, we're alive, we're alive!" he cried, seizing her hand. "The whole earth is ours, though at present we shall occupy only a small corner in Dakota. Here we are!" as the driver drew the horses to a sudden halt. "Will you get out of

the carriage, Mrs. Laura de Sade, Heloise Abelard, Vittoria Angelo — Maggie Parsons?" He emphasized the last with a triumphant accent, bending forward to print a husbandly salute on her lips; just as the driver, jumping down from his seat, with what Maggie thought unnecessary haste, opened the door for them, keeping his eyes discreetly on the ground.

On board the train, Maggie looked out of the window, but could scarcely see the little house on the hill for the tears. She kept her eyes fixed on the landscape as long as she could recognize a single feature of it; then, when all the old familiar landmarks were passed, turned to meet the waiting look of her husband. It was true, then! They were married. It was they two, and together now, for better, for worse; and the swift rushing train bore them onwards.

Miss Graham ate her solitary supper as usual, then sat out the twilight in reflections on the events of the day, and attendant thoughts.

"It's queer the way those girls have turned out," she said to herself, "though I don't know why I should call it queer, either, just because their father was a working-man, who never had a chance to profit by the advantages he took pains his children should get the benefit of. Helen has married a minister; though I don't care half as much about his being a minister as I do about his being John Norton. There's a prospect of his being called to Kansas City. He's sure to make a success, wherever he is, and to deserve it; and Helen Dean is a woman that can fill any place that's offered her. Henry Parsons is one

of the rising young men of the Northwest, they say. I suppose, now that Dakota is coming in, she'll send him to Congress. The papers will talk about him as one of our self-made men, and print accounts of Maggie's receptions. On the other hand, Judge Foster's son ran away with his father's cook. So much for the things called 'class' and 'class distinction' in this blessed, absurd old republic of ours." Having thus settled her views on the subject, she rose and went over to the parrot's cage.

"She's gone, Polly," she said, with a touch of sadness. "There won't be any one to tease or make fun of you any more. I liked her better than I thought I should at first, and so, I guess, did you."

The creature thus addressed pulled its head from its wing to give a melancholy squawk, and disconsolately tucked it back again.

Miss Graham lit the lamp and sat down to her book. Outside, the stars came out and covered the little village with their tender light. They looked down on the brave and kindly spinster, sitting by her lonely fireside, and blessed the goodness that tried to hide itself from sight beneath a harsh and battered exterior. They shone, with soft radiance, into the bedroom where Laura Danvers was absorbed in daughterly cares for the mother growing slowly weaker, from some obscure cause, day by day; and downstairs in the library, where Sidney Gale was discussing with his uncle the feasibility of a trip through the Southern States in the interests of the leather trade. They looked in at the rectory, where

the rector sat in slippered ease in his study, reading a volume of Balzac; his wife had gone out to see a sick child in the parish. They shed soft radiance on the little cottage across the railroad, where Thomas Dean and his wife sat alone. Both children were gone now. They must learn to be sufficient to each other again, as they had been in the early married days. They should often be lonely, but they need not be unhappy. Each day would bring its own task and fresh experience, and there would be the children's letters to look forward to. When the hour of nine struck, Mrs. Dean wound the clock. A few moments after, the lights were extinguished, and the little house on the hill stood in dark and peaceful stillness, wrapped in the safe protecting arms of night.

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